PRIVATE EYE

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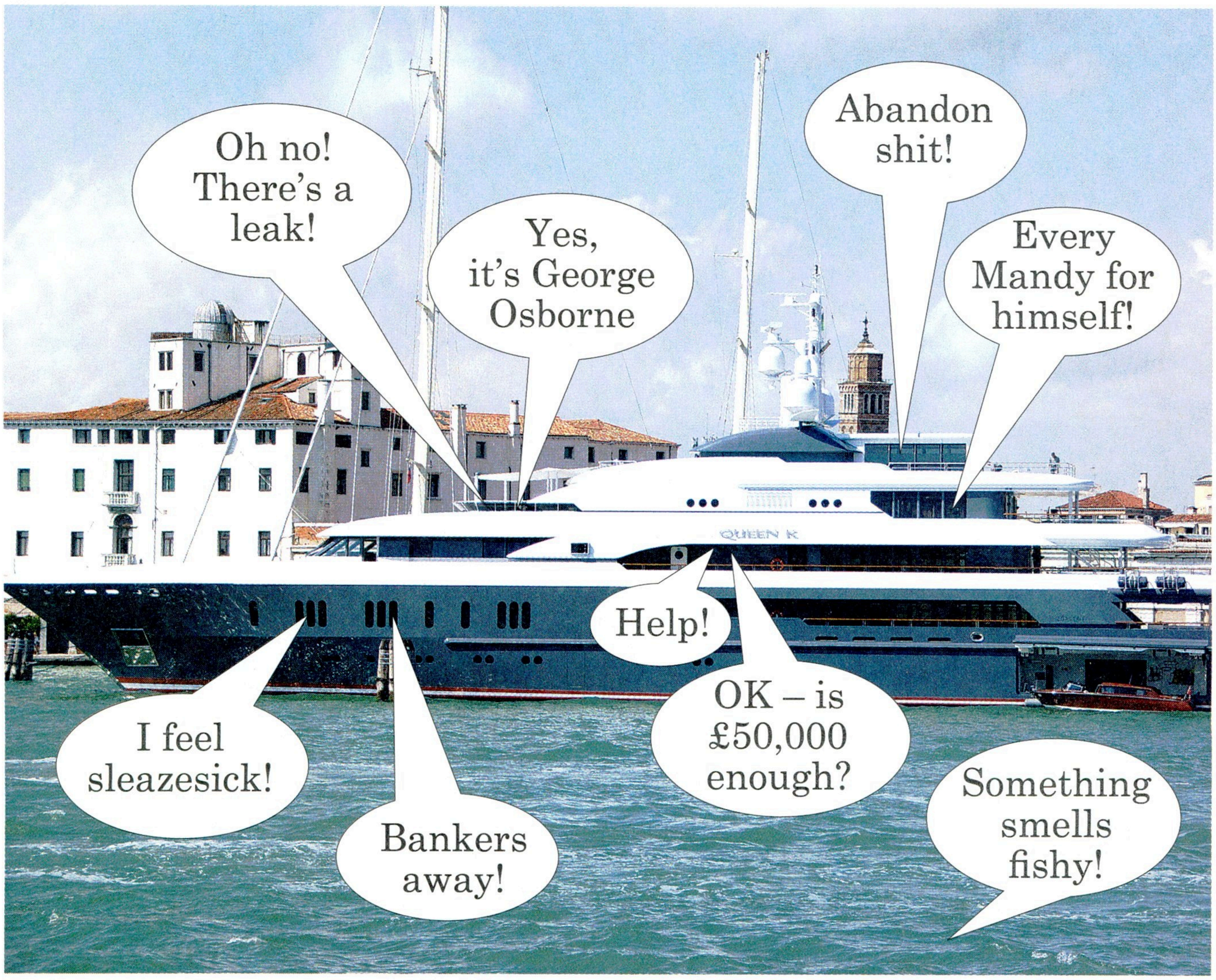
DRAMA ON RUSSIAN BILLIONAIRE'S YACHT



CORFU! WHAT A STINKER!

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T REALISE WE FLY TO LA AND HONG KONG

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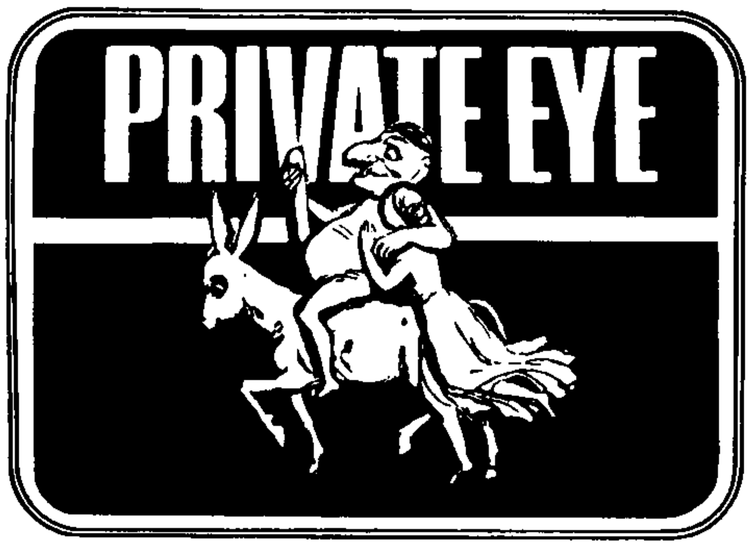
AIR NEW ZEALAND

Is it just a Kiwi thing?



Oleg to stand on...

- **Libel: Why the colonies are revolting** 5
- **Out smarting the Sun: Madgewatch** 6
- **Shortlist for the Paul Foot Award 2008** 6
- **Mandy, Montenegro... and the Mafia!** 8
- **Christie's is hit for six: In The Back** 27
- **Lord Darzi and a galling error: Health** 28
- **Tsar in the east: Deripaska's dark past** 29

LORD Mandelson has had to face a string of awkward questions, not least from the *Sunday Times*, about his involvement with Oleg Deripaska. But would Rupert and James Murdoch really be content to see Mandy hounded from office?

After all, there are so many other pressing issues to deal with, such as the ruling earlier this year by the department of business, enterprise and regulatory reform that BSkyB must sell its anti-competitive 17.9 percent stake in ITV, despite the Murdochs facing losses of hundreds of millions of pounds. What happy news then that there is a new secretary of state in charge of the BERR – none other than Lord Mandelson, the man who was dripping poison in George Osborne's ear at a Corfu dinner held in honour of Elisabeth Murdoch.

There's another reason the Murdochs are paying unusually close attention to the Corfu affair, and why the *Times* became the mouthpiece for Nat Rothschild despite James Murdoch's friendship with Osborne. Rothschild's business partner and father, Jacob, aka Lord Rothschild, is fantastically close to the Digger and his family; so close, in fact, that he has been deputy chairman of Rupert's BSkyB since November 2003 – a detail that has been curiously absent from Murdoch hacks' coverage of the Deripaska brouhaha, apart from a brief mention in last weekend's *Sunday Times*.

Jacob's role at BSkyB has required little more than agreeing to whatever chairman Rupert and chief executive James have wanted. This included riding roughshod over City corporate governance laws last December by letting James switch job from chief executive to chairman, while Jacob has continued serenely in the role of deputy. Lord Rothschild evidently understood exactly why Rupert, another billionaire dad, had wanted the best for his son. So it's no surprise that in a test of loyalties between the Rothschilds and Osborne, callow Georgie never stood a chance.

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"The Scottish banks are among the most stable financial institutions in the world."

– Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond, February 2008

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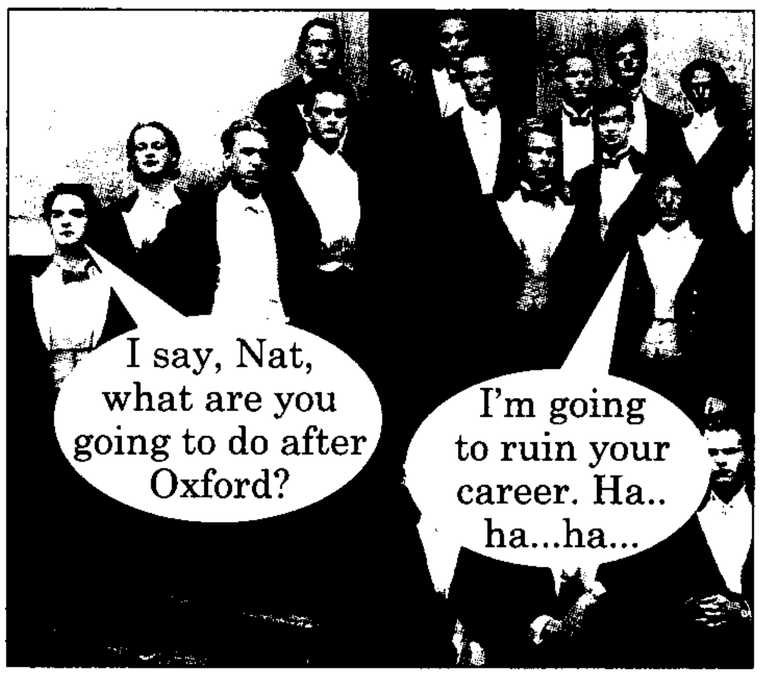


NEVER mind foreign oligarchs with yachts: go-between Nathaniel Rothschild isn't exactly what you would call "onshore" as he signs explosive letters to the *Times* from the Klosters chalet he calls home.

Rothschild is, however, a director of his hedge fund Atticus Capital's significant London business, which, before it tanked this year, was very profitable. It didn't, however, trouble the taxman too much.

Accounts for the fund's UK vehicles, Atticus Limited Liability Partnership and Atticus UK Services Ltd, show they contributed around £100,000 tax in 2007 before ownership of the companies was transferred to Atticus Limited Partnership Inc, based in Guernsey.

As criticism of offshore tax havens grows, at least their richest customers – the hedge funds – can count on a friend in Rothschild's chum and new business secretary, Lord Mandelson.

NEVER let it be said that HM treasury lacks foresight. Advertised in 16 October's *FT* was the position of "deputy governor for financial stability" at the Bank of England.

"This is a high profile and influential role at a time of significant change in financial markets," the ad said of the £240,000 post. "It is an opportunity to put in place robust long-lasting frameworks to deal with stresses in the system and in individual institutions."

Coming soon: Vacancies for the roles of Humpty Dumpty's bodyguard and water-carrier for Jack and Jill...

THOUGH the last *Eye* stated incorrectly that Lord Myners still chairs the personal accounts delivery authority (he in fact resigned on becoming City minister in early October), one man who does remain on the PADA board in the wake of the financial crisis is Chris Willford.

Willford's day job for the past three years has been finance director of Bradford & Bingley, responsible for "risk". Over this period the building society ignored risk to such an extent through its over-extended buy-to-let mortgages that last month, on the brink of collapse, it had to be nationalised.

Just the chap to tell the rest of us how to invest for our retirement!

● *The Turner Pensions Booby Prize, page 7.*

AFTER the banks, should another industry on its knees, housebuilding, be put on the government's shopping list?

Temporary public ownership might be the only way to rescue some firms and meet the government's target of building 3m new homes by 2020. That at least is what senior figures on the Labour left like Jon Cruddas, Peter Hain and Frank Dobson would like.

In fact, unfortunate investments made at the top of the market by part-nationalised HBOS mean the government *already* has stakes in five of the top 20 housebuilders. Meanwhile, the stock market value of six of the seven biggest firms, representing about half the industry, has fallen to just £2.2bn – by coincidence, the very sum paid by one company to acquire a rival in a spectacularly ill-timed move at the start of 2007.

The lucky buyer? Barratt Homes, Mrs Thatcher's favourite housebuilder – now worth just £200m.

HAPPY days are here again at nationalised Northern Rock.

Following last week's revelation that chief executive Gary Hoffman could get a £420,000 bonus on top of his £700,000 salary, the *Eye* learns that sales directors Mark Robson and Richard Tugwell are planning a Christmas jamboree in London for their senior colleagues, which will take in several "golf days" and a week-long stay at the Hempel Hotel for about 10 directors and assistant directors.

Mark and the boys have been trying to get their humble staff in Newcastle to relocate their own Toon-bound Christmas party to London, to spare the directors the ordeal of having to return home before the fun ends. This would mean hotel bills, travelling expenses and meals for about 50 head-office workers – some of whom wonder if their bosses have quite realised that it's taxpayers' money they are spending.

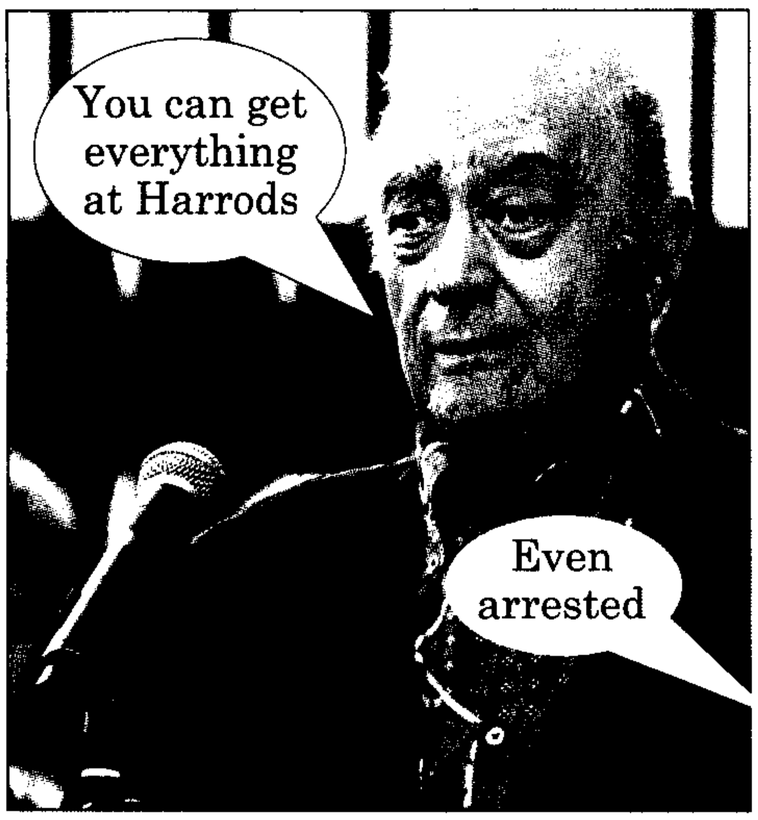
DAVID CAMERON ended his truce with the government over the financial crisis with a ferocious attack on Gordonomics on 17 October, telling a City audience about the "complete and utter failure" of Brown's economic record.

Dave said he could reverse this by "creating an economic framework that enables new businesses to flourish… And that is why we have asked David Arculus, a leading businessman and former head of the Better Regulation Task Force, to head an independent task force examining ways in which a Conservative government could cut red tape."

Whoops! How Cameron intends to fix Brown's ruinous failures by doing exactly what Brown did is a bit of a conundrum. For Brown appointed Arculus in 2005 to promote deregulation, getting the former South West Water boss to write a report called "Regulation – less is more". His work added to the deregulatory atmosphere that allowed banks to create the current crisis.

Arculus's personal involvement with regulations has also caused embarrassment. South West Water manipulated and fabricated information given to its regulator, Ofwat, while Arculus was the firm's chairman.

"It keeps them busy during a recession"



CELEB HUMBUG I

JONATHAN ROSS has consistently complained about the media invading his privacy and in recent years has repeatedly instructed his solicitors at Schillings to warn people about his and his family's rights.

Yet, he had no qualms about invading the privacy of a 23-year-old woman whose famous grandfather he informed via repeated broadcast answerphone messages on Radio 2 that his friend Russell Brand had "fucked", "enjoyed" and "bent over the couch".

Do ordinary people not have any rights? Or do they only apply to seedy, middle-aged celebrities working for the BBC?

CELEB HUMBUG II

"TWO years ago I had a gastric band and do you know what? I did it for me because I wanted to," announced a defiant Fern Britton when she was outed as a surgically aided size 14.

"I didn't feel that I had the need to ring around and let everyone know. In fact only five people knew, including my husband, obviously. I did it for me because why not? I didn't expect there'd be such enormous interest in body image and perception." Ryvita, the firm with whom she had a £200,000 advertising contract, also stood firm: "We respect her rights to privacy on this personal matter."

So how did Britton choose to promote her autobiography *My Story* last weekend? Why, with 1,700 words in the *Mail on Sunday* on the reasons behind "an intensely private decision" by someone who is "by nature a private person", all plugged under the vast front-page puff: "The Truth About My Gastric Band by Fern Britton."

Has the gastric band made much difference to public perception of Britton? Not a lot, it seems. Anyone pre-ordering her book at Amazon is met with the message: "Frequently Bought Together – customers buy this book with *Dear Fatty* by Dawn French."

ATOLL ORDER

YET again the evicted Chagos islanders have been told they can't go home, after law lords overruled the high court's decision that the order forbidding their return to the British Indian Ocean territory was an "abuse of process" *(Eyes passim)*.

The lords made a great deal of the "prohibitive cost" of resettlement on the islands, where the Chagossians believe they could make a living by restoring derelict coconut plantations, fishing and eco-tourism. An independent report suggests the total cost would be around £25m.

The government has already spent at least £2m in legal fees fighting the case (according to figures given to parliament in 2007, before the Lords appeal, the running total was £1.9m). With the islanders planning to take their fight to the European court of human rights next, it could end up costing the government a lot more to keep fighting.

Street Of Shame

"NOT SO SMUG NOW" gloated the headline on the *Sunday Times* News Review last weekend, over a huge photo of George Osborne and his fellow Bullingdonians at Oxford looking all posh and pleased with themselves.

A brave decision by Susannah Herbert, editor of the News Review. For her husband, Jonathan Ford, was the Bullingdon president who appeared with Boris Johnson and David Cameron in that other notorious club photo – one so synonymous with smugness and swagger it has since been suppressed.

"CORPORATE giants are taking longer to pay their small suppliers – threatening to push thousands over the edge," thundered the *Daily Mail* last week as part of its "Fair Deal For Small Firms" campaign.

"This is fuelling the collapse of small businesses, with one in ten blaming their failure on a cash shortage caused by late payments."

And which firm, in a survey by the Credit Management Research Centre of Leeds University in March, was discovered to be the worst in the media sector and the ninth-worst in the entire FTSE 250 for paying invoices late? Step forward… The Daily Mail and General Trust!

WITH the value of pensions plummeting, the *Daily Express* shed a tear for "the real victims of the economic crisis, not the greedy bankers or the reckless fat cats but the millions of decent people who worked hard all their lives to build up a nest egg that would keep them in comfort once their working days were over."

It went on: "Worst hit are the 100,000 who are about to retire. They could lose 20 per ent of their income for the rest of their lives." Britain, it noted, "once had a private pension system which was the envy of the world", but not any more.

One company that had a most enviable private pension system was Express Newspapers. Alas, a week after publishing its trenchant leader, the *Express* announced that it would be freezing its final-salary scheme and asking staff to transfer to a less lucrative one.

Happily, there is one person at the firm who won't struggle in his old age. In 2006, Richard "Dirty" Desmond took £40m out of the company for himself – with a healthy chunk going into his own pension pot. For some reason this "reckless fat cat" has so far escaped the wrath of his leader-writers.

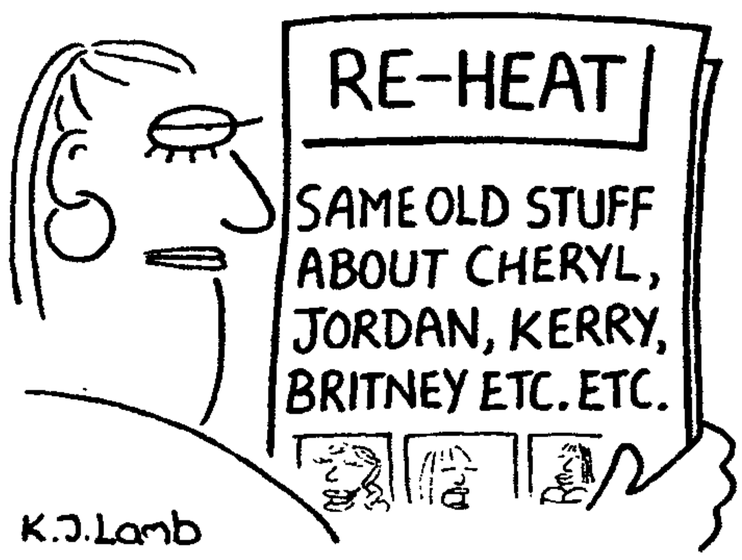
*"I did think the Prince might just **recognise** the girl… I mean just how drunk was he?"*

"MANDY's Muppets have been riding to his defence," Richard Littlejohn informs *Daily Mail* readers.

"One of Fleet Street's Alice Band (they're all either called Alice or married to someone called Alice) accuses the *Mail* in general, and me in particular, of being motivated by 'homophobia'."

Littlejohn has had his eye on this sinister clique for some time. "Cameron is the invention of a coterie of privileged, thirtysomething scribblers," he wrote on 10 January 2006. "I think of them as the Alice Band, because they're all either called Alice or married to someone called Alice. Notting Hill is their very own Alice Springs. But it's Alice in Wonderland to kid themselves that their fashionable obsessions are shared wholesale by downtrodden Middle Britain."

The scribbler who accused him of homophobia was Alice Miles of the *Times*; the Cameron groupie rubbished in the earlier piece was Alice Thomson, then of the *Daily Telegraph*. But what of these ghastly men "married to someone called Alice"? Why doesn't he name names? Probably because the man he has in mind is Alice Thomson's Cameroonie husband Edward Heathcoat Amory – one of Littlejohn's colleagues at the *Daily Mail*.



IN A column on "the dangers of dabbling with the super-rich", *Times* columnist Alice Miles explained last week why George Osborne was courting disaster by holidaying with Oleg Deripaska, Peter Mandelson, et al. "Mr Osborne appears to have broken the fundamental rule of this social circle: omerta. Never, ever talk to the press."

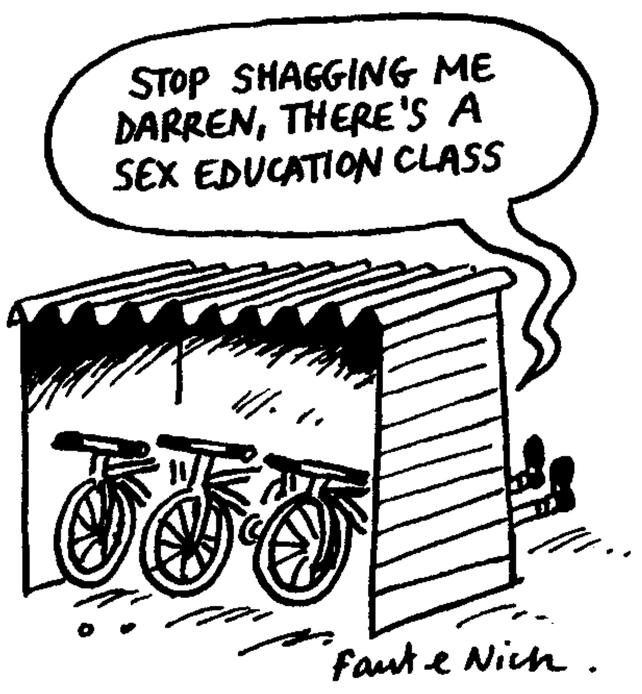
What Miles omitted to mention is that this dangerous social circle also included her proprietor, the Dirty Digger, his daughter Elisabeth and son-in-law Matthew Freud. Still it must be a great relief to all Ms Miles's friends that she at least appears to understand the importance of omerta when it comes to her own social circle.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

2,000 miles Distance Rupert Murdoch was prepared to fly David Cameron for a meeting two years ahead of a possible election

10,000 miles Distance Rupert Murdoch was prepared to fly Tony Blair for a meeting two years ahead of the 1997 election

CORRECTION: Suzanne Moore informs us that the piece about her in the last *Eye* was "utter bollocks". The writer with whom she travelled to the US was David Matthews, not Williams; they both flew economy class; she never discussed the trip with her editor; and they were there to write about the presidential election, not about Matthews's "slave roots". Apologies to both of them.



BRRRING, brrring! Thirsty *Daily Telegraph* editor Will Lewis picks up the phone. "You're a cunt!" says a rough-sounding Glaswegian.

Former *Times* editor Charlie "Gorbals" Wilson (for it is he) explains that he holds the Commonwealth all-comers' record for the most consecutive appearances in the *Eye*'s Street of Shame column, having been written about in 12 successive issues. "If there's anything about you in the next issue you'll beat my record, you thirsty cunt."

Happily for Gorbals, there was not a word about Will Lewis in the last *Eye*. His record stands.

"I'M looking forward to the challenge of four shows a week," said Jeff Randall, departing as editor-at-large at the *Daily Telegraph* for a Monday-Thursday business show on Sky News.

But hang on: surely he could have broadcast as often as he liked at Telegraph TV, the online channel launched last year? Er, no. Its daily show, *The Business Bullet*, is presented by Robert Miller and Randall was hardly likely to commit himself to a pretendy TV station broadcast from a broom cupboard.

And what of Telegraph TV's politics show, *Right On*? It has disappeared without trace since July. Star turn Simon Heffer has declined to appear since May, after Liz Hunt elicited the flustered confession from the ginger whinger that: "I know I'm completely charmless and very unpopular, but my back is broad and I'll just have to cope with that."

Still, there's always the web, where senior editors are wondering what direction this brave new world might take them next.

"We've always found it so difficult to quantify success for journalists," mused *Telegraph* assistant editor Justin Williams on his personal blog recently. "Is it number of stories written, number of exclusives delivered or some other nebulous yardstick?

"The web changes this and I wonder how long it will be before owners and accountants notice this… Which will be the first publisher to build a bonus based on page views into a journalist's salary? Could you do it with your entire reporting staff and, if so, would it lead to a decline in standards?"

Naturally, these are Williams' personal thoughts. But the raft of hacks – sorry, "content editors" – recently recruited by might be advised to cram references to sexy teens, cute squirrels and Britney Spears into every story, just in case.

JUST FANCY THAT!

FROM the *Guardian Book of English Language*, included free with the *Grauniad* on 27 September 2008:

"Even if you have always wanted to appear in *Private Eye*, resist the temptation to write such nonsense as 'grey is the new black', 'billiards is the new snooker', 'Barnsley is the new Tuscany', etc."

From the *Guardian* magazine, 25 October 2008: "Is wine the new baked beans?"

CHEQUERED CAREER

WADDLING, bow-tied Raymond Keene, chess correspondent of the *Times* and the *Spectator*, has long been known as "the Penguin" because of his uncanny resemblance to Batman's arch-enemy, and his doppelganger would surely admire Keene's latest larcenous exploit.

In a recent *Spectator* column, Keene complained about the shrinking coverage of chess and other serious games in the *Guinness Book of Records* – "a couple of dozen words about Sergei Karjakin being the youngest chess Grandmaster, while another page offers brief features on the smallest and largest chess sets… Although poker has five entries, games such as draughts and bridge receive no treatment at all." Yet the book found space for "such pivotal attainments as 'most heads shaved in 24 hours'; 'fastest time to drink a 500ml milkshake, 'longest tandem bungee jump…'"

Alas! When Keene posted the piece on the Chessgames.com website last month, an alert reader pointed out that much of it had been taken verbatim from an article by the chess historian Edward Winter, which appeared in his *Chess Notes* newsletter as long ago as October 2006.

The Penguin reacted with a glorious display of squawking and spluttering. "All I can think of is that somewhere Winter's comments may have been quoted without authorship or attribution so I regarded them as being in the public domain," he wrote on the Chessgames discussion site, thus provoking further questions about why he thought it OK to pass off someone else's article as his own, even if he didn't know the name of the author. To spare his blushes and reduce his blood pressure, the site's controllers have now excised all these critical postings – though, bizarrely, his flailing replies are still there.

This isn't the first time the Penguin has been caught red-handed. When the chess-writer John Donaldson read Ray Keene's *Complete Book of Gambits* in 1992, he was amazed to find that the chapter on Lisitsin's Gambit had been copied almost word-for-word – with no acknowledgement – from Donaldson's article on the subject, published by *Inside Chess* magazine the previous year. Keene's American publishers had to pay Donaldson $3,000 and withdraw the book.

Do his high-minded editors at the *Times* and *Spectator* have any qualms about employing this absurd comic-book villain? Apparently not.

FLYING SO LOW…

IN THE last *Eye* we ran a ludicrous letter from Jim Callaghan, a legal drone from Ryanair, demanding £1,000 because we'd used its logo in a spoof advert in the joke pages. "*Private Eye* received no authorisation to use our trademark," he huffed.

So Ryanair wouldn't use anything without authorisation? Of course it would – and often has. In February this year it had to pay damages to Carla Bruni and Nicolas Sarkozy for using their picture in a French Ryanair ad without permission. Unabashed, the airline has done it again – this time with Germany's best-known literary critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki.

The 88-year-old critic caused a sensation two weeks ago by refusing – in front of a live TV audience – to accept a lifetime achievement award at the German equivalent of the Baftas. "I can only throw this object in front of me," he said, pronouncing the show "terrible" and "idiotic". This sparked two print advertisements in the German press: one for broadband provider Deutsche Telekom, which was endorsed by Reich-Ranicki, and one for a certain Irish airline ("This prize I will accept") – which, true to form, hadn't bothered to seek "authorisation". Jim Callaghan, sue thyself!

AUCHI! IT HURTS

ALMOST unnoticed in Britain, the US Congress is making a unilateral declaration of independence from Mr Justice Eady. The "libel tourism bill" won the support of Democrats and Republicans, neo-cons and leftists, in the House of Representatives last month, and legislators predict it will sweep the Senate when Congress returns after the presidential elections.

As regular *Eye* readers know, the willingness of Eady and his superiors in the judiciary to allow the global plutocracy to sue foreign writers in London's libel courts has caused an international scandal.

Eady's decision to let the Saudi banker Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz sue the New York author Rachel Ehrenfeld provoked the backlash. America is deciding to make English libel judgments unenforceable in the US and, according to one amendment before the Senate, to allow American victims of the English courts to claim punitive damages, because the Ehrenfeld case failed to meet minimum standards of justice.

It was not only that neither bin Mahfouz nor Ehrenfeld was English that provoked their amazement. Nor was it that she had not published her book, *Funding Evil*, in Britain, promoted it here or sold more than a handful of copies here. To top it all, a New York State jury had charged the Saudi banker with fraud for his part in the collapse of the corrupt Bank of Credit and Commerce International. He paid the New York authorities $225m in lieu of fines.

Among the many reasons the English judiciary is feared by free men and women the world over is that the judges no longer seem to care about the characters of rich litigants. As long as they have the money, they're welcome at the high court.

Before the Mahfouz case, the law lords allowed film director Roman Polanski to sue the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, even though he had fled to France to escape charges that he sexually abused a 13-year-old girl. Polanski still faced the problem that if he came to London to give evidence, he would be arrested and deported to the States. "A fugitive from justice is entitled to invoke the assistance of the court," simpered Lord Nicholls as he and his colleagues allowed Polanski to give evidence via a video link from Paris. A jury in Eady's court duly awarded £50,000 damages and £1.5m costs against *Vanity Fair*.

Polanski does not have a conviction for paedophilia. Bin Mahfouz paid $225m without admitting guilt. But as the *Eye* reported (*Eye* 1213), the convicted criminal Nadhmi Auchi and Carter Fuck are successfully using English law to wipe the web clean of unflattering reports about the Iraqi-born British plutocrat.

Not only did Auchi receive a suspended 15-month sentence for his part in the Elf Aquitaine affair (which he is still trying to challenge), but he also had a "business relationship" with Tony Rezko, the slum landlord and political fixer who bankrolled Barack Obama. When a Chicago jury convicted Rezko of 16 counts of mail fraud, money laundering and aiding and abetting bribery in June, the Obama connection meant the world's journalists wanted to find out more about the mysterious Mr Auchi. They searched the British press in vain. Surrender is invariably the order of the day in Fleet Street lawyers' offices, and the *Telegraph*, *Observer* and *New Statesman* had already agreed to bow to the demands of a proven fraudster to remove investigations about him from their sites and issue apologies.

Fortunately, the US anti-censorship site Wikileaks copied their articles and put them on the net. But British newspapers and bloggers who mention Wikileaks receive a threatening letter from Carter Fuck warning of a libel action unless they remove the link. To date, everyone has.

English law is so biased against freedom of speech and investigative journalism, no wonder our former colonies are revolting.

'Ratbiter'

OUTSMARTED! MADGE AND THE SUN

"ONCE again the world woke yesterday to another stunning *Sun* exclusive. Our revelation that Madonna and her husband Guy Ritchie are to divorce is the year's hottest showbiz exclusive," boasted that paper on 16 October.

And indeed, every news outlet had scrambled to follow-up the tale – it had even featured as one of the main items in the BBC's morning news bulletins, despite the fact that it was not officially confirmed until late afternoon.

Why, then, did previous startlingly-similar scoops, such as the *Mirror*'s 27 June front-page exclusive "Madonna: I want a divorce" not cause a rumpus on a similar scale? Because for years the *Sun* has been known in the industry for taking down stories, and "steers" on stories that had appeared elsewhere, at dictation speed from the singer's spokeswomen, Liz Rosenberg and Barbara Charone. In return they receive privileged access whenever Madonna, Ritchie or any of the publicists' other high-profile clients, have something they want to plug. Thus anything on the topic of Madonna which appeared in the *Sun* could be taken as the "official" version.

That doesn't, of course, mean it is the true version. So it was the scoop-tastic *Sun* whose showbiz editor Gordon Smart revealed on 26 July that the couple planned to renew their wedding vows in a special ceremony at which "a host of their closest friends will see Madonna and film director Guy stand up and reassure everyone their marriage is as strong as ever"; predicted the imminent adoption of another Malawian child to "prove their marriage is back on track" on 13 August; noted Ritchie's "emotive speech that helped dispel rumours the couple are on the brink of splitting" at Madonna's birthday party on 18 August and revealed on 30 August that "the loved-up pair" were viewing holiday properties in Sicily, so unbreakable was their bond.

In return a thrilled Smart was given the chance to "share the journey from London to Cardiff" with Ritchie to watch the opening night of his wife's tour from the wings, and to have a pint with the director in a pub ahead of the opening of his most recent gangster film ("it's a corker" declared a besotted Smart).

So how to deal with the fact that all this was evidently bollocks when news of the divorce was confirmed? With the biggest reverse ferret in recent tabloid history, of course, as Smart was wheeled out for a carefully-orchestrated campaign of "profile-raising" appearances courtesy of Murdoch stablemate Sky News and other credulous media outlets.

"The marriage of Madonna and Guy Ritchie has been dogged by bitterness and recrimination for YEARS – and any notion that they have battled to save it is a myth," declared the inaptly-named showbiz editor on 16 October, following it up with a few personal insights from his own privileged position. "I have spent a lot of time with Guy over the past few months… I saw their marriage cracking."

"It's worse for me. I'm morally bankrupt as well"
(Private Eye, June 1987)

RAY LOWRY
CARTOONIST
1944-2008

THE PAUL FOOT AWARD 2008

AFTER record submissions, the judges for the Paul Foot Award for Campaigning Journalism 2008 have drawn up the following shortlist (in alphabetical order):

Richard Brooks *(Private Eye)*
Camilla Cavendish *(The Times)*
Andrew Gilligan *(Evening Standard)*
Warwick Mansell *(The Times Educational Supplement)*
Dan McDougall *(The Observer)*
Jim Oldfield *(Rossington Community Newsletter, South Yorkshire Newspapers)*

The award was set up by *Private Eye* and the *Guardian* in memory of Paul Foot, the journalist and left-wing campaigner who died in 2004. The £5,000 prize will be presented in London on 3 November, with the runners-up receiving £1,000 each. On behalf of this year's judges – Clare Fermont, Bill Hagerty, Ian Hislop, Richard Ingrams, Alan Rusbridger and Michelle Stanistreet – chairman Brian MacArther gave the following citations:

● **Richard Brooks, *Private Eye***

Early in 2007 Brooks discovered, buried away in a memo submitted to a public accounts committee inquiry into the government's management of shareholdings in various corporations, a highly valuable but largely unheard of fund management company called Actis. He then wrote a series of articles exposing the sale of a key government international development business to the organisation's own management for a fraction of its value, and the transformation of an effective development body into a money-making machine for executives at the expense of the world's poor.

● **Camilla Cavendish, *The Times***

The outrageous miscarriages of justice being perpetrated on children, because unaccountable social workers are removing them from parents in closed courts with virtually no scrutiny, have been raised before. But in a series of articles Cavendish provided a more detailed analysis of the many injustices which result from the Children's Act 1989 and from the professional cultures which have grown up around child "protection" – and did so in a sustained way which will force the authorities to think again. The *Times*' campaign goes beyond the submitted articles and the paper has run several leading articles. Many disparate campaign groups have been encouraged to put their links on the *Times* website, and have urged readers to email their MP. Hundreds of readers have contacted their MPs as a result, and the letters those MPs have written to Jack Straw [the justice secretary] are putting real pressure on the Ministry of Justice.

● **Andrew Gilligan, *Evening Standard***

Gilligan's investigation exposed the so-called "Lee Jasper affair", serious financial irregularities in London's City Hall and the London Development Agency, involving a senior aide to the then mayor, Ken Livingstone. The investigation has so far resulted in six police inquiries, seven arrests and Mr Jasper's resignation and was credited by some, including Mr Livingstone, with his defeat in the mayoral election. Following the election, the LDA is to be restructured. The investigation involved seven months of research, and is based almost entirely on documentary sources, such as internal City Hall and LDA emails leaked to Gilligan, and on-the-record quotes from whistleblowers found by him.

● **Warwick Mansell, *Times Educational Supplement***

Mansell wrote extensively about the government's school testing/exams regime, including the first major story on the Sats test marking scandal which led to the late return of thousands of pupils' test papers and the sacking of test contractor ETS Europe, and the first story bringing together opposition across the education profession to the government's league tables/targets/testing regime of school accountability. There was also a follow-up exclusive on problems with the possible successor to the Sats tests.

● **Dan McDougall, *The Observer***

In 2007/2008, the *Observer*'s South Asia Correspondent carried out undercover investigations in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh which led to the shaming of three of the world's top five retailers, Esprit, Primark and Gap Inc, all for using children in their supply chains. His exposés led to all three firms sacking or fining major suppliers, cancelling millions of pounds worth of contracts and launching multi-million pound social funds; in Gap's case a $5m gift to build community centres in some of India's poorest cities and in Primark's the establishment of the multi-million pound *Better Lives Foundation*, promising to invest in social programmes in the developing world. According to Bhuwan Ribhu from the Global March Against Child Labor, India's leading campaigner against sweatshops and child slavery, McDougall's investigations have prompted not just major conglomerates but the Indian government to radically alter their approach to tackling child labour.

● **Jim Oldfield, *Rossington Community Newsletter, South Yorkshire Newspapers***

Before Britain had ever heard of eco-towns, *Rossington Community Newsletter* was featuring the activities of a group of landowners and speculators to plant one in the village of Rossington – Rossington Eco-Town – apparently against the wishes of 13,000-odd residents. In month-by-month reporting the Community Newsletter:

- "Outed" one local councillor for helping frame this and other developments while not declaring his interest as a significant landowner, in partnership with former Metro Centre developer and Newcastle United chairman Sir John Hall.
- Ran a village poll which showed the residents to be overwhelmingly against development of their village.
- Exposed the government's short-listing of the Rossington eco-town bid as having a huge number of houses planned for green belt land. After the resultant national newspaper publicity, the government u-turned and said no green belt land would be used for Eco-towns… and the Rossington bid was cut from 15,000 houses to 5,000.

Highly commended on the longlist were:

Ben Leapman, the *Sunday Telegraph;* Jonathan Ungoed-Thomas, the *Sunday Times* and Heather Brooke, *Freelance, Freedom of Information Campaigner* for their three-year battle to obtain details of MPs' second home expenses using the new Freedom of Information Act which has forced parliament to tighten its procedures for approving expenses claims.

Nick Davies, the *Independent, City AM, Private Eye* and the *New Statesman* for stories based on or extracted from his book *Flat Earth News* investigating falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the news media.

David Harrison, the *Sunday Telegraph* for his exposure of the brutal Nigerian gangs who buy children, including babies from desperately poor families, only to sell them into slavery to families in the West.

James Lewis, *Legal Business Magazine and the Guardian* for three investigative features, revealing the unscrupulous nature of the activities undertaken by various of London's major law firms on behalf of their clients.

TURNER BOOBY PRIZE

WHAT a great month for the government's pensions bill to complete its passage through parliament before becoming law.

With the stock market lower than it was ten years ago, the government will have everything in place for its National Pensions Savings Scheme, under which, from 2012, employees will be automatically enrolled in personal pension accounts that invest their savings in… the stock market.

The plan, thought up by the new Financial Services Authority chairman Lord Turner when he ran the government's pensions commission three years ago, assumes that the stocks and shares held in the accounts will make annual 3.5 percent returns *after* inflation. Except, of course, when the markets crash, as they appear to about once a decade. The downside isn't properly factored into the calculations and is only mitigated by investment shifting to safer bonds in the final five years before retirement: not too much consolation to a 50-year-old who spends ten years buying shares at higher prices than he cashes them in for.

Even on the government's crash-free forecasts there would be millions of people going into the scheme who, because of the loss of other benefits or their debts, would be better off not bothering with a pension account. Brilliant!

SLEAZEWATCH

WITH impeccable timing, the day after twice-resigned minister Lord Mandelson of Foy and Hartlepool donned his ermine and returned to the cabinet, the government rejected a parliamentary committee's calls to improve the investigation of ministerial sleaze.

The public administration select committee had recommended that the prime minister's adviser on ministerial interests, a position created in the wake of the Blunkett scandals two years ago, should be able to investigate what he wanted rather than be told what to do by the PM. The first holder of the post – ahem, Sir John Bourn – hadn't been asked to investigate anything, prompting the committee to remark that: "There is no point in having an investigator in post if he is not given the discretion to investigate very public allegations that the [ministerial] code has been breached." This could have been a not-so-subtle reference to John Prescott's trip to casino magnate Philip Anschutz's ranch, which Tony Blair didn't see fit to refer to Bourn.

But the government was certainly not going to give the watchdog any teeth, and it dismissed the idea of letting the adviser have a mind of his own as in deciding whether there should be an investigation, "the prime minister will wish to take into account a range of factors".

Nor was the government having the idea that the adviser should be appointed independently. "Since the role involves the provision of advice to the prime minister on issues of a highly sensitive nature, it is essential that he or she has trust and confidence in the post-holder," explained the cabinet office.

So much for the "different type of politics" Gordon promised when he became PM.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£7bn Icelandic bank funds frozen under UK anti-terrorist asset-freezing orders

£0.0005bn Terrorist funds frozen under UK anti-terrorist asset-freezing orders

CALLED TO ORDURE

WHEN even Mr Speaker starts sloping off early for the week, the House of Commons can be said to have a problem. With a record Christmas recess just announced and the government throttling any discussion of abortion laws, the question arises: does the elected chamber need a firm kick up the arse?

Speaker Michael Martin appears relaxed about leaving Westminster before the end of the parliamentary week. Previous Speakers were punctilious about being "on deck" until the last scrapings. Not so Glaswegian Martin.

The debates of Friday 17 October, for instance, saw the chair being occupied by two of Martin's three deputies, Sylvia Heal and Sir Alan Haselhurst. Where was Martin? Had he and the imperious Mrs Martin scooted off to the airport the previous day to catch a flight home for the weekend?

Thursday afternoons also tend to be busy for the Speaker's deputies. Thanks to New Labour's reforms of parliamentary hours, Thursday sessions now start at 10.30am. Once Business Questions has ended at about 12.15pm, few gallery journalists bother to look in on the House. Tory MPs, who hate Martin, have noted with satisfaction that the supposed figurehead of parliamentary democracy gathers up his gown and sometimes vacates his chair before lunchtime.

Thursdays were once busy days at Westminster. No longer. If Mick Martin is on little more than a three-day week it might suit the Tories, but what is the point of giving the Speaker a grace-and-favour mansion inside the Palace of Westminster if he buggers off to the British Airways shuttle lounge halfway through Thursday?

Tuesdays are not much better. Lamentably few MPs took part in the recent banking bill debate on a Tuesday afternoon – supposedly the highlight of the new Commons week. "There is something very British about this debate," said Croydon's Andrew Pelling at one point. Too right, mate. Hardly anyone turned up! A global financial crisis in full spate, Britain hitting a recession, the public fretful about their savings… yet only 17 MPs can be fagged to make formal speeches.

Still, the debate had its moments. A fogeyish Tory, Charles Walker (Broxbourne), interrupted his own speech because he thought he heard someone seeking to make an intervention. "Does someone want me to give way?" trilled Walker, blinking mole-like. "I'm sorry, I've taken my glasses off so I'm completely blind." Great.

The weakness of the Commons was demonstrated in the human fertilisation and embryology bill's debate. Although there was talk of this conscience issue being a free vote, the government controlled the debate by restricting the time allowed for it. Quite a lot of MPs were keen to discuss abortion but Labour was desperate not to let this happen, possibly because it could affect the Glenrothes by-election campaign, possibly because Gordon Brown did a dirty deal with Ulster Unionists a few months ago not to permit any change in abortion law.

As Ken Clarke (Con, Rushcliffe) argued: "The House has lots of time. I cannot remember a period in which the Commons has had less serious business to transact." Clarke was right but it didn't do any good. Down came the guillotine and MPs were prevented from talking about a major issue.

Once again Michael Martin was absent, his place being taken by deputy speaker Sir Michael Lord. Labour backbencher Dari Taylor turned to him at one point and made a small mistake, calling him "Mr Deputy Warden". Up piped George Howarth (Lab, Knowsley N): "It does sometimes feel like a prison." A prison in which not very much happens, at that.

'Gavel Basher'

TORY OVER A BARREL

THE enthusiasm of Sir George Young, Tory grandee MP for North Hampshire, in helping the *Daily Mail* on its belated and fruitless fishing expedition for evidence to fight a libel action brought by one of his constituents, property developer and landowner Harry Marriott, has backfired spectacularly.

The *Mail* was forced to issue a grovelling apology and hand over damages and costs totalling around £100,000 for "the distress and embarrassment" caused by a story that wrongly claimed Marriott had meanly cut off the water supply to neighbouring villagers and then offered to sell them water at £250 a barrel – none of which was true.

Initially Marriott, who, with his wife, Dinah, daughter of playwright William Douglas-Home and niece of ex-prime minister Alec Douglas-Home, owns the Tangley Estate in Hampshire, merely asked the *Mail* for a correction of the series of errors and falsehoods that littered the story. When the newspaper refused, he sued.

For some curious reason, Sir George agreed to act as a postbox for the *Mail*'s lawyers, circulating a questionnaire about water supplies to certain villagers and inviting them to consider providing "help" to the *Mail*. He may regret this rather unusual constituency business. Marriott happens to be one of the MP's more generous Tory patrons.

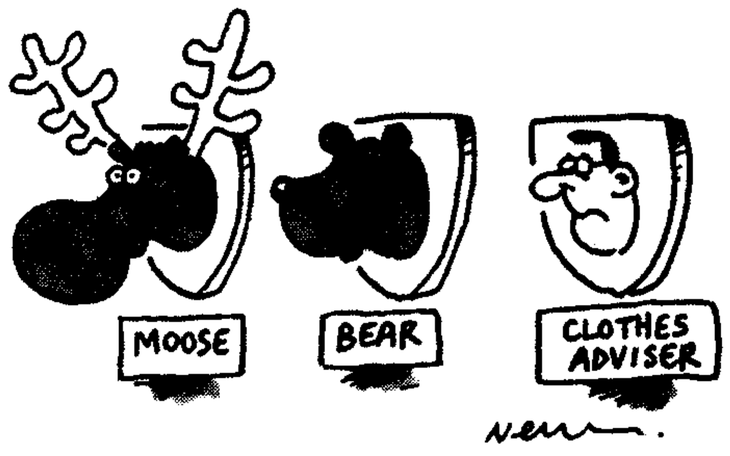
NUMBER CRUNCHING

£50,000 Donation to Conservatives which George Osborne denies soliciting from Oleg Deripaska and suggesting he channel, legally, through one of his British companies

£3,655,201 Donations to Conservatives made by Lord Ashcroft channelled legally through one of his British companies

A FOOLISH foray into property development by Hove Tories provides a cautionary example of the Conservatives' ability to handle the economic downturn.

Hove Conservative Club took out a £1m loan in 2006 to convert the top floors of its attractive HQ into luxury flats. But with the work now completed it has failed to sell any of the flats for the £375,000 asking price. Now Hove Tories must sell off their entire clubhouse just to pay off the debt. Lucky it's not a country they're running!



BRUSSELS SPROUTS

ARE the eurocrats in Brussels losing their marbles as well as our money?

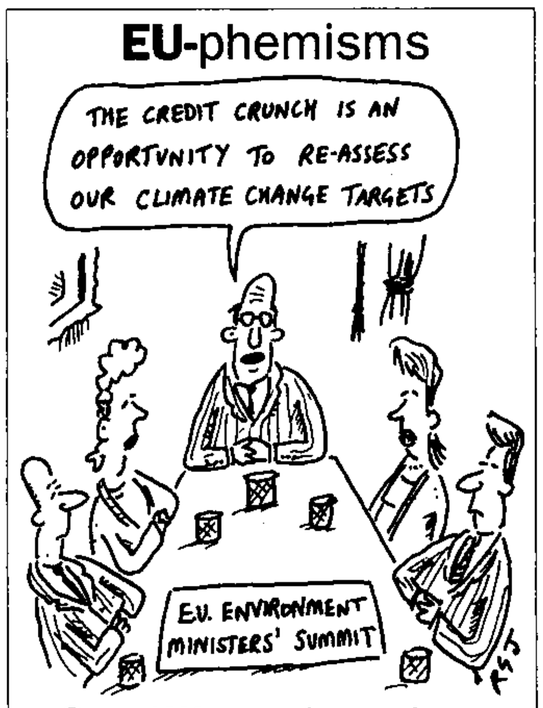
While happy to release billions of euros of taxpayers' money to help the bullies of the crime-fuelled Bulgarian government, the European commission is putting charities and churches on the rack in its quest for information on money laundering.

Under the rules of the EU's grandly named 3rd Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Directive (directive 2005/60/EC), the UK's Financial Services Authority is now obliged to examine the personal details of those connected to religious and charitable organisations on the pretext that they may be plotting terrorist activities, and has sent a demand for the information, warning that "non-compliance of regulatory obligations" would be "serious".

Meanwhile, EU bosses have offered €11bn in aid to the Bulgarian government – despite widespread reports of corruption and money laundering in the country, and despite Bulgaria's failure to identify the source of crime when it joined the EU last year.

Criminal gangs are now so rife that the Bulgarian MP Atanas Atanasov, a former counter-intelligence chief, has commented: "Other countries have the mafia. In Bulgaria, the mafia has the country."

EU-phemisms



Great! We can dump these targets we never intended to meet and blame the banks

EUROPE'S patent officers downed tools in September, claiming they were being forced to hand out patents willy-nilly to useless inventions, simply to be able to charge the patent fees. Now these bad patents have greater force in the UK, thanks to an appeal court ruling on the patent for a piece of mobile phone software.

The half-day strike by European Patent Office (EPO) staff in Berlin, Vienna, Munich and the Hague followed claims by the staff union that the EPO administrative council, which is made up of the representatives from the national patent organisations, is pressurising officers to sign off on as many patents as possible, regardless of standards. While the UK's Intellectual Property Office (IPO) is a government agency, some other countries' patent organisations are private firms.

Officers warn that a "sea of junk patents" will hamper new ideas and leave companies bogged down in court cases. The EU receives 450,000 patent applications a year.

The court of appeal ruled on 8 October that the UK's IPO was wrong to refuse software company Symbian's patent application for a programme that had already been granted a patent by the EPO. The IPO has long resisted patents for software, while the EPO is happy to dish them out. The judge said that the discrepancies between the IPO and the EPO were absurd and the two offices should be "marching together as far as possible".

LONDON CALLING: GAME BOY BORIS

"Millions of seven- to-15-year-olds are hooked, especially boys, and it is time someone had the guts to stand up, cross the room and just say no to Nintendo. It is time to garrotte the Game Boy and paralyse the PlayStation, and it is about time, as a society, that we admitted the catastrophic effect these blasted gizmos are having on the literacy and the prospects of young males... Summon up all your strength, all your courage. Steel yourself for the screams and yank out that plug. And if they still kick up a fuss, then get out the sledgehammer and strike a blow for literacy."
– Boris Johnson, *Daily Telegraph*, December 2006.

"I'm delighted that the London Games Festival is back in our city for its third year. It demonstrates the creativity and range of the gaming industry, which, as an important part of London's creative sector, makes a vital contribution to the economy as a whole. With events across the capital, the festival has something for everyone and illustrates the popularity of this thriving form of entertainment."

– Mayor Boris Johnson welcomes fans of the blasted gizmos to London's video-gaming extravaganza, October 2008.

ECO-GNOMICS

WHEN energy secretary Ed Miliband said Britain should aim to cut greenhouse gases by 80 percent by 2050, he scorned those who thought the government should drop its "climate-change objectives" in "tough economic times". But did anyone tell Gordon?

On the same day the PM was in Brussels slagging off fuel retailers for not cutting the cost of petrol at the pumps sufficiently and threatening them with action by the Office of Fair Trading.

This year high oil prices forced many motorists to adopt greener habits (driving less, driving more slowly and sharing cars) to save cash; and as a result the treasury netted less in fuel duty, just as the slowing economy hit other revenue sources.

Last year Alistair Darling announced an extra 2p a litre on road fuel in April 2008, later postponed to October. He caved in to pressure as oil prices peaked in July, postponing the rise again. However, oil prices have since dropped to their lowest for 14 months.

Cheaper road fuel would only stimulate a revival of profligate motoring and increase fuel sales – bringing the treasury extra cash in fuel duty (a fixed sum per litre) and compensating for lower VAT per litre (a percentage of the price). Hence the spectacle of a PM demanding a retreat from climate-change objectives in tough economic times and an energy secretary claiming the government was doing the opposite.

EYE TOLD YOU SO: "China's pioneering eco-city of Dongtan stalls" revealed a *Sunday Telegraph* "investigation" on 19 October, recording the non-event that is the "world's first eco-city." *Eye* readers of course knew all this back in June (*Eye* 1211) when this column reported how the project, run by UK engineering giant ARUP, had been a non-starter for at least three years.

"In return for keeping the Dongtan eco-myth alive in the media," we reported, "ARUP has won numerous contracts in China, including less green (and more visible) projects like airports and skyscrapers. So the real trend to watch is the continued practice of large companies promoting their 'green' credentials to win political connections and new business whilst doing bugger all."

Letter from **Montenegro**

from Our Own Correspondent

PETER MANDELSON may be a prophet without honour in his own land, but here in Montenegro we don't look gift horses in the mouth.

As trade commissioner in Brussels, he got us into the World Trade Organisation and has backed us to join the EU. And though we've never heard of your Mr Osborne, we are fond of some of Lord Mandelson's other holiday chums: Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska and money man Nat Rothschild.

In fact we like Mr Deripaska so much our hard-working and patriotic leaders gave him our aluminium industry for a song, in what was of course a thoroughly transparent deal. We can also thank Messrs Deripaska and Rothschild for their support for plans to turn the derelict port of Tivat into the Monaco of the Adriatic. Naturally, what our nation of 670,000 souls really needs, when top doctors earn as much as €300 a month, is a bunch of glittering casinos and a fully equipped parking lot for Russian mega-yachts.

When you live in a country as well managed and honestly run as Montenegro, you need all the friends you can get, even when, like Deripaska and your Baron Foy, they come with more baggage than an airport carousel. Thanks to our breathtaking coast and mountain scenery, we've always boasted a certain Ruritanian charm; but these days we're more *Scarface* than *Prisoner of Zenda*. Mandy recently claimed we have made "remarkable progress" since gaining independence from Serbia two years ago. So how unkind some people are to suggest Montenegro is run by a neo Mafiosi family clan headed by our Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic. Indeed, as recently as June Italian news agencies described our leader as head of an "international mafia group", smuggling billions of euros worth of cigarettes into Italy for almost a decade. In recent years, anti-Mafia authorities have called for the extradition of our Milo, aka "Britva", the "straight razor".

It's not so long ago our main port of Bar would crackle to the sound of shoot-outs between rival Camorristi hoods from Naples looking to control the tobacco rackets while their speed boats ferried illicit cigarettes. But it's quieter these days.

One sign of our government's special talents is that in our otherwise impoverished land, new apartment blocks and shopping malls are sprouting everywhere. For we're not all poor. Some estimates put Milo's offshore loot at £500m while others say that's an insulting underestimate. Rich, powerful and backed by our thoroughly straight security apparatus, Milo quite rightly refuses to allow opposition parties to see the government books. And what better place to park our tax revenues than in Prva Banka, which he owns with his older and equally rich brother, Aco?

Thank goodness we have decent libel laws, which help protect us from our two litigation-swamped independent papers. The media is not faint of heart, though. Last year the managing editor of *Vijesti* was beaten to a pulp and four years ago, the *Dan's* editor Dusko Jovanonic was shot dead outside his offices. For good measure, *Dan's* electricity was mysteriously cut off and it now has to burn logs to keep the ink viscous enough for its presses!

Like all misunderstood great men, Milo yearns for respectability. That's why he's been talking to the Italian prosecutors – a decision he took the day after we gained independence and he received diplomatic immunity. We await the Italians' decision with interest. To further butter up the west, Milo's just recognised Kosovo, a final act of betrayal to mother Serbia, which led to riots in Podgorica. Milo may enjoy Mandy's support to join the EU by 2012, but if he ever does clamber aboard the Brussels gravy train, take our advice – go to the restaurant car and start counting the spoons.

ITV

Question Time
Crimewatch UK
Imagine (all BBC1)

THE three shows listed at the top of this column are familiar British TV series. But soon we should be thinking of them as Welsh or Scottish instead.

Under a scheme to increase regional representation, part of the deal under which the BBC charter and licence fee were renewed, **Crimewatch UK** will, within the next few years, be produced from Wales, while **Question Time** and **Imagine** will have their new HQs in Scotland, although Alan "Botney" Yentob's show will be allowed to keep a London base as well, to reduce the risk of culture shock.

London broadsheets, led by the *Torygraph*, have reacted as if the plans are to incarcerate David Dimbleby in a Glasgow studio and make him wear a kilt. In fact, as *Question Time* comes from a different regional location each week, it could theoretically be produced from anywhere; but the rest of the project is a typical mess.

Many of the shows that are apparently moving north or west "within three years" are not actually commissioned that far ahead. So the decree that Botney will be Jockney by 2011 may founder if a future controller of BBC1 doesn't want films about Al's Pals from Scotland or anywhere else. This is a good example of the division between the bureaucratic and creative arms of the BBC, with one side making promises the other may not want to keep.

The sense of confusion, though, should be no surprise. Ever since the creators of national broadcasting made "British" the first name of the corporation, but placed the headquarters close to Whitehall, regional representation has been a faultline in the BBC. Whereas ITV was genuinely cross-country, with Manchester-based Granada at least as powerful as Thames, Aunty favoured a parallel system. Viewers and listeners got their real programmes beamed from W1 or W12 but had separate local stations on which hosts with the native accent would discuss how the team played last night and the progress on the Arndale Centre extension.

This division between UK shows and you-there programmes was increased by the great tartan diaspora by which any presenter who achieved any success on Scottish local shows – Brillo, Wark, Eddie Mair, Nicky Campbell – would be rewarded with a real series down in the smoke. There were exceptions – most of the great TV drama of the 70s and 80s was produced from Pebble Mill in Birmingham – but, in general, the corporation became a southern metropolitan outfit, with period bouts of cost-cutting even reducing the influence of Pebble Mill.

What buggered this set-up was Scottish nationalism. The emergence of a stronger identity north of the border created strong resistance to the idea of the news being beamed up from London. So "regional opt-outs" increased, with *Newsnight* notoriously getting an add-on for the final 20 minutes each night. And minor Scottish football games are featured in the main BBC News bulletins, when English fixtures of equivalent rank are ignored.

This uneasy combination of national and local broadcasting hasn't worked. Paxo got into the habit of carelessly carrying on talking past the point where *Newsnight Scotland* was supposed to opt out and there are employees of the BBC whose entire job consists of writing to fans of Lincoln City and Bristol Rovers to explain why Huw and Fiona read out Inverness Caledonian Thistle results but not theirs.

But, as Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond pursued his strategy of making Scotland the new Iceland, the political pressure on the BBC increased. Significantly, the announcement that *Question Time* and other shows were going north was immediately followed by praise from Salmond and various MSPs.

Perhaps the project will turn out to be mainly symbolic. Under an earlier regionality scheme, *Film 2008*, like many of its numerical predecessors, has long been officially produced from Scotland. But Wossy has never set foot there except when a mate like Ricky G happens to be doing stand-up at the Edinburgh Festival; and most of the production team have a get-out clause to be based in London because that's where the screenings and junkets are held.

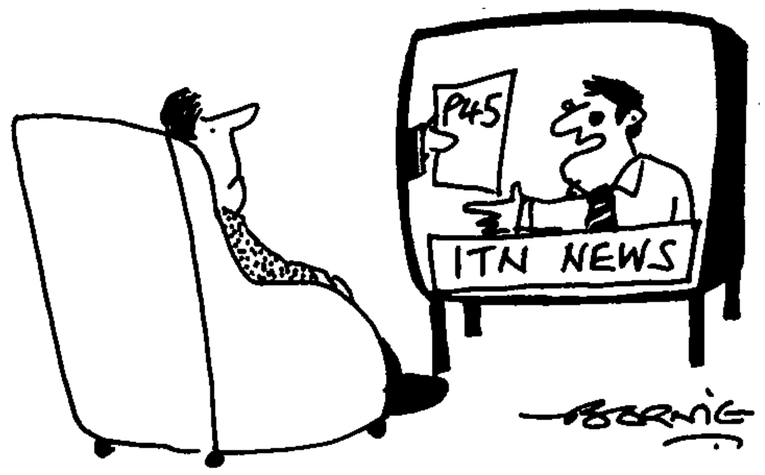
So, in a classic Beeb muddle, *Film* is Scottish for bureaucratic and accounting purposes but, in reality, about as London as lunch at the Ivy. The Dimbles and the Botneys will be hoping that the latest long march north turns out to be as cosmetic as that: noticeable only when the *Sunday Times* runs an occasional front-page rant about the astonishing cost of train and air fares bringing the producers back south.

But, this time, everyone suspects that pressure from a BBC Trust desperately justifying a nationally-levied viewing tax will combine with prime ministers anxious to maintain the state of the Union to make regionality real.

Viewers in much of the country will wonder in bewilderment why every single actor used in *Crimewatch UK* reconstructions has a Welsh accent or *Question Time* consists of Dame Kirsty Wark, retired to her homeland, quizzing four members of the Scottish parliament about Aberdonian fishing quotas.

So, either the regionality initiative will turn out to be an expensive exercise in paper-shuffling that will mainly benefit the balance sheets of British Airways and British Midland or a number of successful programmes will be ruined to appease political and politically correct agendas. What a grim choice. But this is one of the prices we pay for a system in which the national broadcaster has to submit to political blackmail every decade to secure its funding.

'Remote Controller'



"Excuse me – my producer is just handing me a note"

MEDIA NEWS 1

THE BBC's boast that its coverage of the US elections will be a "multimedia extravaganza" is no idle one.

Its usual live election coverage on the day will appear simultaneously on BBC1, BBC News and BBC World, featuring teams of reporters across the country and the usual, gimmick-led Jeremy Vine analysis of the results. *Question Time* and *The Politics Show* and their production teams will also be stateside to provide "a number of specials", including British guests flown over for the recordings.

All this is on top of the hosts of production teams working on the usual news outlets for four radio stations, the News channel, the 1pm, 6pm and 10pm News and BBC Online.

The post-election party promises to be a busy one, held in Washington and featuring a plane full of club-class BBC executives keen to celebrate Barack Obama's victory before retiring to their hotels in Washington and New York to sleep off the champagne.

BBC Wales is so sure that Obama will win that it has already printed "Obama '08" party invites.

Whether this saturation coverage will attract any viewers remains to be seen.

DISCOVERING that the BBC's email system had gone down, managers acted at once to alert staff, by, er, sending them an email. "There is a server problem and some people may not be receiving emails," it said.

One hack who did get the email was foghorn-voiced John Sweeney, the short-tempered tormentor of the "Church" of Scientology. "Stop sending me emails I can't receive," he demanded.

Fearing an imminent tantrum, Stephen Mitchell, Head of multimedia programmes, replied at once: "Stop replying to emails you haven't received."

In 2004, the BBC "outsourced" its entire IT system to Siemens in a contract worth £2bn, in part to modernise the email system and prevent farces of this kind.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: Which musical starts with a cowboy singing *Oh, What A Beautiful Morning*?
Contestant: *Cabaret.*
AR: In the English monarchy, which house followed the Tudors?
Contestant: Buckingham Palace.
AR: The 17th-century physician who discovered the true nature of the circulation of blood around the human body was William who?
Contestant: Shatner.

MEDIA NEWS 2

***CHANNEL 4 News* has re-assembled its "Facing the Crunch" panel of political "experts" to comment on trends in the polls.**

Thus Polly Toynbee, formerly "the journalist and commentator who has the ear of all the top politicians" but now billed more modestly as "one of Britain's most influential columnists", is back to announce that Gordon Brown may win the next election: "I think he is back in the game." Just over a month ago, Polly told the same panel that "if Labour has any chance of succeeding, they've got to get rid of their leader".

Such inconsistency is nothing new. In December 2006 Toynbee hailed Broon as "the man who studies everything, consuming documents with the speed of a shredder. Standing at the dispatch box, the towering superiority of his brain makes intellectual pygmies of his opponents."

By April, however, she had changed her mind. "The Wizard of Oz stands exposed, the emperor has no clothes, the box of secrets is empty," she opined.

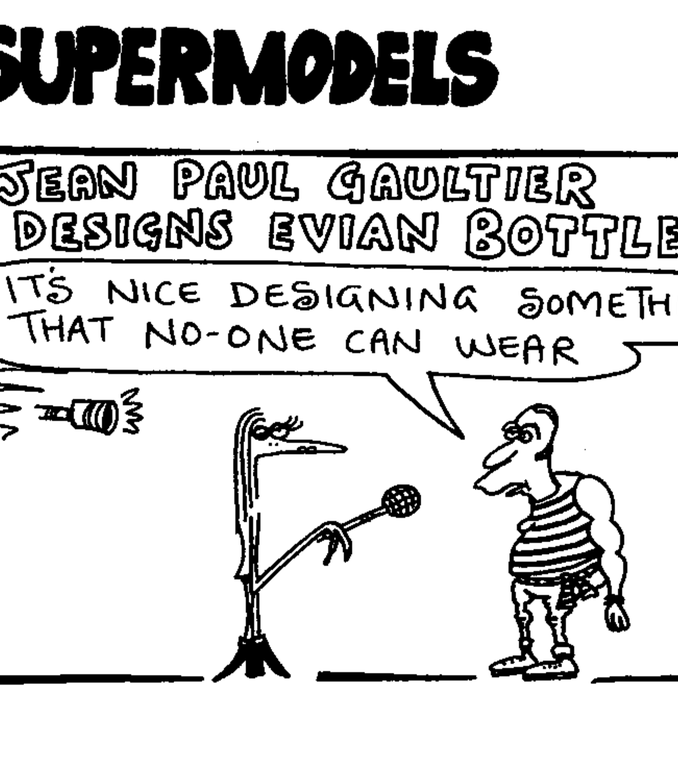
LUVVIES

She [Tilda Swinton] is a floating event, coupled to which she is merry, smart, amiable and honest. She is a film star now (not that that status means much), and other film stars should beware because Swinton could blow the concept to smithereens. She is a terrorist more than an actor.

Guardian film website

Submitted by Julian Shea

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.



AD NAUSEAM

MICROSOFT'S latest ad spots are a direct response to competitor Apple's long-running "I'm a PC, I'm a Mac" campaign.

They begin with the ad industry's stencil of an Ordinary Joe saying: "Hello. I'm a PC – and I've been made into a stereotype." They then follow people from all walks of life saying that they too "are" PCs, with the obligatory smattering of celebrities including the actress Eva Longoria and the pop star and producer Pharrell Williams.

Whoops! Unfortunately for Microsoft and its agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky, Longoria has recently been photographed going through airport security at LAX with a Mac laptop in her hand, and Williams is also a documented Apple user – as you'd expect from someone in the music business. Moreover, a quick look at the metadata of some of the images for the campaign on Microsoft's website revealed they were created… on Apple Macs!

THE announcement of Cadbury as the latest £20m sponsor of the 2012 Olympics means this festival of physical excellence is now promoting, among others, a fast-food chain (McDonald's), a soft-drink manufacturer (Coca-Cola) and a confectionery giant.

A Cadbury spokesperson, however, was anxious to assuage the doubters, saying: "We would not do anything that would seek to encourage people to eat more chocolate." This may be advertising's toughest ever brief…

JUST FANCY THAT!

"I recorded a voiceover for my first ever TV commercial this morning, to promote a new food range for Marks & Spencer… waxing lyrical about a big, juicy steak."

– Piers Morgan, 'Insider' column, *Mail on Sunday*, 29 September

"Sales of fresh meat at Marks & Spencer have dropped by a dramatic 28 percent."

– *Daily Telegraph*, 23 October

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

JEAN PAUL GAULTIER DESIGNS EVIAN BOTTLE!
IT'S NICE DESIGNING SOMETHING THAT NO-ONE CAN WEAR
.... AND THEN I LEAVE MY CLOTHING RANGE, AND GO AND DESIGN AN EVIAN BOTTLE!
ev

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN Richard Hickox conducts a rare Vaughan Williams opera at ENO in a few weeks' time, it will be a rare-ish UK sighting of the man who spends half his life as music director of Opera Australia. But this may change.

As his predecessors will testify, Opera Australia is a venomous institution with a habit of chewing up music directors and spitting them out. It happened to the last one, Simone Young, who now does desperate things like judging BBC2's *Maestro* (though she salvaged some dignity by pulling out of the final). Now it's happening to Hickox, too.

The poison started when a disgruntled Australian mezzo called Fiona James complained that her career had been spiked by Hickox's tendency to give his wife, Pamela Helen Stephen, the plum mezzo roles.

Initially it seemed like the rant of an artiste in decline (the company investigated and found no case to answer). But then another disgruntled singer – a baritone called Bruce Martin – claimed Hickox had spiked *his* career in various ways. He was followed by a better-known baritone, Jeffrey Black, who claimed to have been sidelined and alleged that Hickox's regime had "catastrophic consequences for a whole generation of Australian singers".

Now the floodgates have opened as every singer in the southern hemisphere seems to be accusing Hickox of unethical behaviour, favouritism, nepotism, poor judgement, inexperience... you name it. The chorus of disapproval has been swollen by those who object to the fact that: (a) Opera Australia's music director is English; (b) he isn't in Australia the whole time; and (c) he doesn't spend enough time in Melbourne, which Opera Australia is meant to service as well as its more prestigious home, Sydney.

Conveniently for the anti-Hickox lobby, the campaign against him has become entangled with a whole mess of issues about historic cultural rivalries between Melbourne and Sydney and revelations of a squandered legacy that was meant to benefit Melbourne's operatic life.

The details are complicated. But basically, an old Melbourne lady died in 2002 and left AU$1.73m to what she called the "Victoria State Opera" – a company that no longer existed because it had been taken over by Opera Australia. OA claimed the money; so did three other, small-time Melbourne opera companies. And they've been fighting over it ever since, through court actions that have grown to Dickensian scale and generated legal fees that have now wiped out most of the original legacy.

This has become a national scandal, with the blame largely attaching to OA as an obstinate, arrogant and high-handed organisation. And though none of these legal actions has anything to do with poor Hickox, so much mud is being thrown around that some was bound to hit him.

Hickox defends himself vigorously against all charges, but the outlook isn't good – and hasn't been helped by a recent casting of his wife as Carmen, a role for which, by most accounts, she wasn't suited. In response to complaints of nepotism, Hickox makes the fair point that his wife is a fine mezzo and there's no reason she should be penalised for being the music director's wife – as she would be if he didn't use her. Australia is a small operatic market where other opportunities are limited.

Though Hickox's offences are minimal, with so many baying for blood, his chances of survival in the snake-pit of Australian opera are not great.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

THE road to recovery may be a lengthy one for councils who have squandered millions in Iceland, if the case of Western Isles council (WIC) is anything to go by.

Only as recently as 2005 did WIC manage to repay a huge rescue loan from the Scottish Office that it had to take out after investing – and losing – £24m in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) in 1991, shortly before the crooked bank went bust.

Apart from putting all its eggs in one basket, WIC had been in the habit of borrowing money "before need" and then lending it on in an attempt to play the money markets and glean a few percentage points of extra interest – a practice it had been warned against. After the exposure of these illegal goings-on the council's chief exec and chief finance officer were sacked and the convenor (leader) resigned.

Since BCCI it has operated a super-prudent investment policy, including a bar on putting money in foreign banks – which enabled it to feel a certain amount of *schadenfreude* earlier this month as scores of other councils had their fingers burned in Iceland. Let's hope these councils don't all take 14 years to recover.

● ONE of the biggest losers in Iceland was Tory Barnet council in north London, which invested £27m in 2006 and 2007 – representing 8 percent of its total cash portfolio of £328.8m.

Earlier in 2006 the council had borrowed £40m and earmarked it for a long-term scheme to renovate or rebuild all the borough's primary schools, which has begun this year. The council admits that borrowing money so far in advance of need is "not the norm", but claims it was "opportune" to do so because of low interest rates prevailing in 2006. Another word for borrowing money cheap and then attempting to cash in from a higher rate might be "speculation". Borrowing money "before need" and then lending it on in an attempt to play the market sounds suspiciously like what went on in Stornoway all those years ago.

So was Barnet breaking the law? Guidance on local authority investment issued by the office of the deputy prime minister in 2004 states that less "prescriptive" regulations introduced in the 2003 local government act "allow the temporary investment of funds borrowed for the purpose of expenditure in the reasonably near future". Then it goes on to say that "the speculative procedure of borrowing purely in order to invest remains unlawful". So Barnet wasn't breaking the law. Unless, on the other hand, it was. Thank you, John Prescott!

PS: Barnet has a plan to repay the £40m it borrowed in 2006 – from the proceeds of selling "surplus" land freed up by the schools building scheme. In the depths of the worst property slump for generations, how clever this is remains to be seen.

SLUMMING IT

THE Scottish National Party's annual conference earlier this month welcomed a report condemning the exploitation by "slum landlords" of residents of Govanhill, an impoverished area of Glasgow's south side which suffers some of the worst housing conditions in Britain.

No doubt this was endorsed by the area's millionaire SNP councillor, Jahangir Hanif, who on Glasgow council's members' register of interests declares ownership of seven properties in the district. One of his flats is in Westmoreland St, where conditions are so grim residents have nicknamed it "ground zero". In July the *Daily Record* interviewed a family of five Romanian *Big Issue* sellers who were paying Cllr Hanif £500 a month for the privilege of living in a building with garbage and excrement piled in the yard and a heroin addicts' "shooting gallery" on the ground floor.

Cllr Hanif is more popularly known in Glasgow as "Cllr Kalashnikov" after the time he took his children to the village of Durra, near the Pakistan-Afghan border, to fire AK-47 assault rifles (*Eye* 1220). Durra, site of the world's biggest illegal weapons market, is where the Taliban do much of their shopping. It's a broad kirk, the SNP!

CHINESE CRACKERS

THANET in Kent has taken another step towards becoming "The Home of Chinese Globalisation" by approving phase one of the controversial China Gateway industrial park (*Eye* 1218) that could eventually see 76 acres concreted over, much of it prime agricultural land above the area's aquifer.

At a shambolic full council meeting, Thanet's Tories rubber-stamped the application from Commercial Group Properties (CGP), the AIM-listed outfit proposing the development in conjunction with the Chinese government's outward investment arm, Chinamex. This was despite protesters' concerns that not enough thought had gone into preventing contamination of the area's water supply should a toxic spillage occur, and the presence of a fireworks factory ringed by an "untouchable" safety zone slap, er, bang in the middle of the site, with a lease until 2013.

CGP boss Ken Wills must, however, have been confident of success. His largesse has known no bounds in this part of Kent recently. As well as treating council leaders and officers to an all-expenses-paid "fact-finding" trip to China last year, his £12,500 donation to Margate's Big Event airshow/festival, organised by the council last summer, can't have done any harm. A £25,000 donation to Thanet South MP and former transport minister Steve Ladyman's Labour party won't have hurt either. The fact that Thanet council itself stands to make a substantial buck from a crucial "ransom strip" it jointly owns with Kent county council may also have helped councillors come to the right decision.

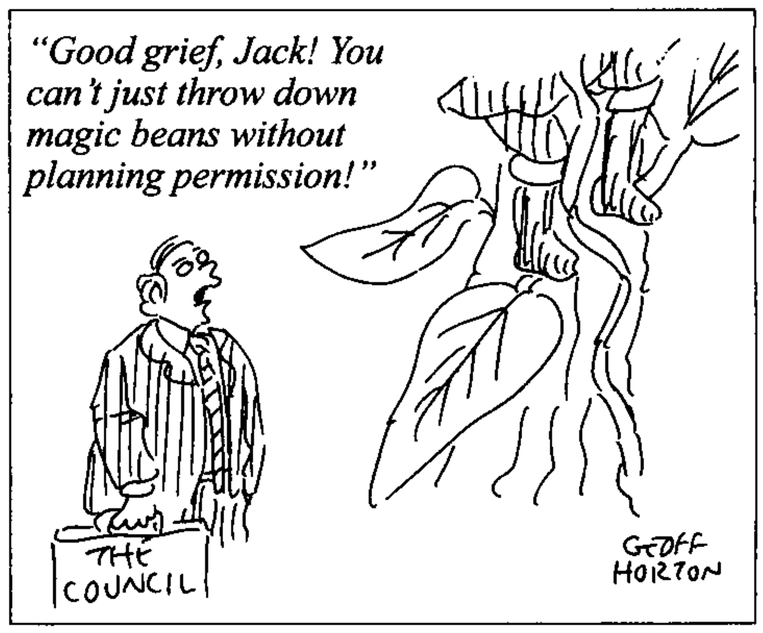
Happily, news that at least 470 tons of the chemical cyclohexanone had seeped into Thanet's groundwater over the past 12 years following a spill at another industrial site only, er, leaked out after the council meeting!

SLEAZY DOES IT

RESIDENTS opposed to the opening of a lap-dancing club in London's West Kensington – more than 2,000 have signed a petition against it – are pinning their hopes on the two Tories and one Labour councillor who sit on Hammersmith and Fulham council's licensing committee.

They will decide on 6 November whether builders David Moynihan and Andrew Byrne, the directors of "Passion Nights Ltd", will get an extension of the former Fox Tavern's entertainment licence to the upper floor before installing 50 naked lap-dancing booths. As well as the petition, 900 locals have written to the council to object.

One of the Tories on the panel is Greg Smith,



H&F's cabinet member for crime and antisocial behaviour. Smith is a board member of the Young Britons' Foundation, a libertarian, right-wing body that "identifies, trains, mentors and places philosophically sound activists in politics, academia and the media". Last year, as part of its educational activities for young people, YBF organised a May Day party at Peter Stringfellow's lap-dancing club the Wardour, in Soho.

Meanwhile, 119 MPs have signed an early-day motion in the Commons calling on the government to close a loophole in the 2003 licensing act and reclassify lap-dancing clubs as sex establishments in the same way as porn shops and cinemas, which would bring them under tighter council control. Only four Tory MPs have signed; Hammersmith & Fulham's Greg Hands is not among them. But as a member of a party that featured £10 discount vouchers for a Birmingham lap-dancing club in its party conference welcome pack last month, perhaps it would have been hypocritical of him to do so. Bada-bing!

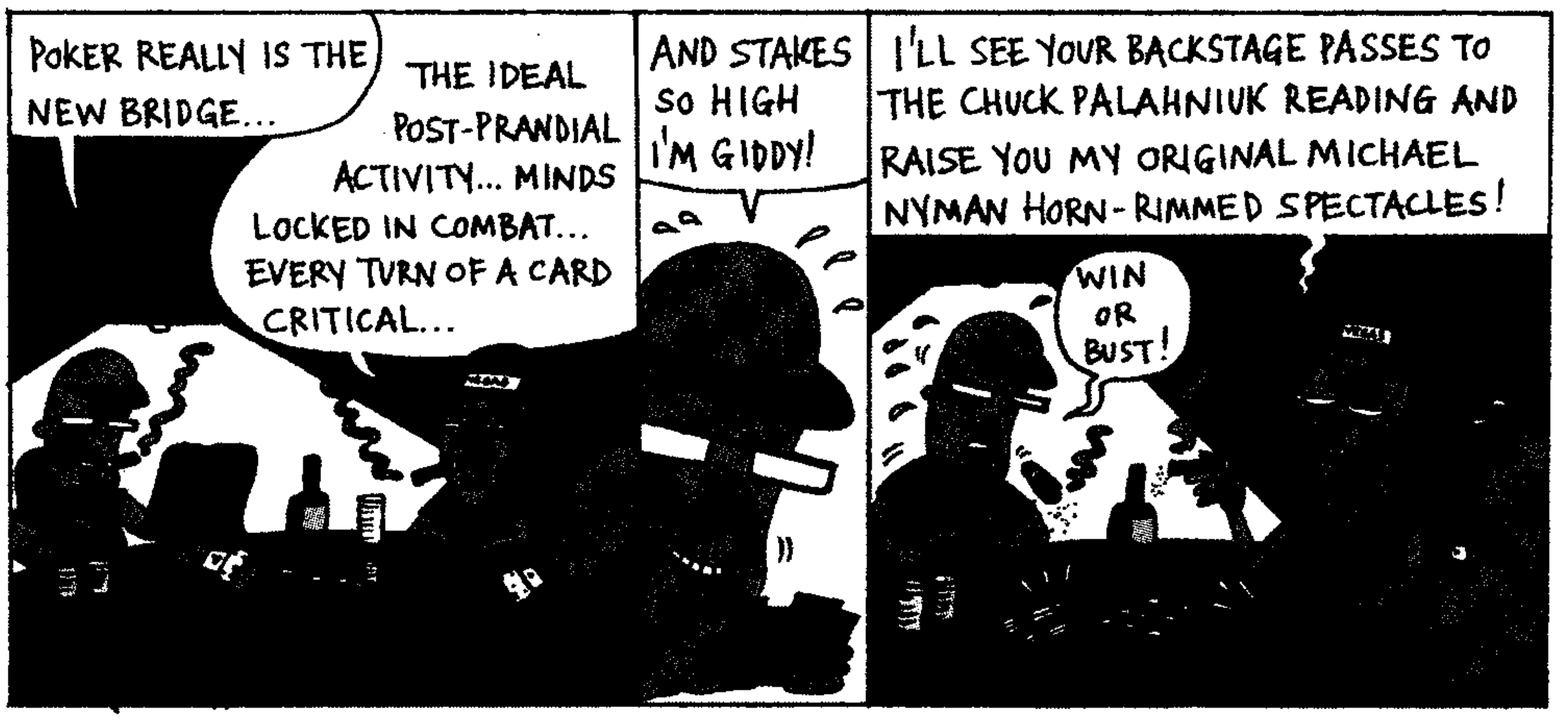
IT'S A STEAL

SINCE 2001, when Lambeth council scrapped its housing fraud team, council coffers have been depleted over and over by frauds, exacerbated by incompetence in the housing department.

Between 2003 and 2005 Alexander Watson-Jones, a temporary worker, scammed £2.6m by "purchasing" central heating systems that didn't exist on behalf of the council in batches worth £100,000 apiece (*Eyes passim*). Now, more than two years after the event, it has emerged that in 2006 the housing department paid Stephen Fabian-Adekunle, a Lambeth council caretaker, five months' sick pay – while he was in prison on remand. Fabian-Adekunle was later convicted of laundering £200,000 for an identity-theft gang that plundered at least £2.3m from bank accounts belonging to customers of HBOS, HSBC and Barclays. He was jailed for 2½ years. One Barclays customer whose account was targeted was TV news man Rageh Omaar.

Lambeth also granted the accomplished fraudster tenancy of a council flat – when he already owned a property in neighbouring Southwark, which he'd purchased under right-to-buy. Nice work!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


POKER REALLY IS THE NEW BRIDGE...
THE IDEAL POST-PRANDIAL ACTIVITY... MINDS LOCKED IN COMBAT... EVERY TURN OF A CARD CRITICAL...
AND STAKES SO HIGH I'M GIDDY!
I'LL SEE YOUR BACKSTAGE PASSES TO THE CHUCK PALAHNIUK READING AND RAISE YOU MY ORIGINAL MICHAEL NYMAN HORN-RIMMED SPECTACLES!
WIN OR BUST!

NOOKS and CORNERS

AFTER the scheme for ruining Union Terrace Gardens in Aberdeen (*Eye* 1219) comes another example of large sums of public money being available to spoil something.

Winckley Square in Preston is a Late Georgian and Early Victorian development of great charm, while the extensive gardens in the centre make a wonderful oasis so close to the city centre. The gardens are particularly remarkable as the land is not flat and is laid out in an informal manner. As Pevsner put it back in 1969: "Preston is lucky to have such a square… to have this quarter so near the centre is the rarest of advantages."

Like Preston's other parks, the gardens have been neglected but have survived because of restrictive covenants dating from 1854 and an agreement of 1951 with the then local corporation that the character of an "enclosed ornamental square gardens" must be preserved and that they must not be used for any other purpose.

Despite this Preston city council and the North West Development Agency held a competition earlier this year to "redevelop" Winckley Square to complement the monstrous Tithebarn Project shopping centre which will sweep away the city's rather decent 1960s bus station. The Cooper Partnership, a "design consultancy" based in Bristol, won the competition with a scheme the council says is "innovative and striking". There will be granite walkways and lots of fibre-optic lights, and the centre-piece will be a 64-jet fountain, of pink and grey granite, which, when turned off, will double as a stage for musical events. All this requires the levelling of the centre of the square and chopping down about a quarter of its trees. The compensation? There is to be the "creative use of sculpture and metal artwork". This includes scattering about giant letters which would spell out "Winckley Square". Councillor Anthony Gornall, chair of the judges, said: "We were blown away by the quality of the winning design – it is… contemporary, yet subtle…" In fact it is a tired and gimmicky re-hash of Post-Modern ideas fashionable in the late 20th century. Others are unimpressed, and the Preston Historical Society and the Preston & South Ribble Civic Trust together with some of the residents and co-owners of the square have condemned the plans. In particular, the only architect among the judges, Keith Scott, has disowned the project saying it "misses the point". It would also contravene the 1854 and 1951 covenants and agreements, especially as an entertainment licence will have to be sought if the stage is ever used if the 64 fountain jets are turned off (not that it is likely they will work for long: the city council maintains the gardens).

Because of the protests, the silly idea of hanging metal letters from the surviving trees has been dropped, but the development agency is still willing to come up with £3m to carry out the rest of the design. Preston council has not consulted either the Garden History Society or the Victorian Society and took five months before bothering to inform and request the consent of a major co-owner, the Trustees for Catholic Purposes (St Wilfrid's Presbytery is in Winckley Square). Whether the council will ever be able to afford to ruin Winckley Square remains doubtful, however. Work on restoring and improving two other parks in Preston, Avenham and Miller Parks, is likely to come to a halt for want of £1.4m. A pity, as those parks need attention, while what Winckley Square needs is a careful, informed and scholarly restoration. Roll on the recession.

PS: Still in Preston, St Walburge's, the magnificent Victorian Catholic church with its towering spire by J.A. Hansom (*Eye* 1198), remains threatened. For although English Heritage has offered a large Places of Worship Maintenance Grant, on condition it remains open, and locals are busy fund-raising, the wretched Lancaster Diocese is still determined to close this wonderful building.

'Piloti'

HIGH PRINCIPALS

ESSEX University has given English language tuition company INTO University Partnerships the cold shoulder and is bringing its programmes for international students back in-house.

INTO was poised to take over the programmes for international students at the Colchester-based university, where around a third of the 9,000 students come from abroad (paying juicy fees). More than 500 a year take courses to develop their English language skills to the level needed to study their subjects.

After "exploratory discussions" in March, the university was excited that the INTO deal could "provide worldwide marketing opportunities and new teaching and residential accommodation". But now it has changed its mind.

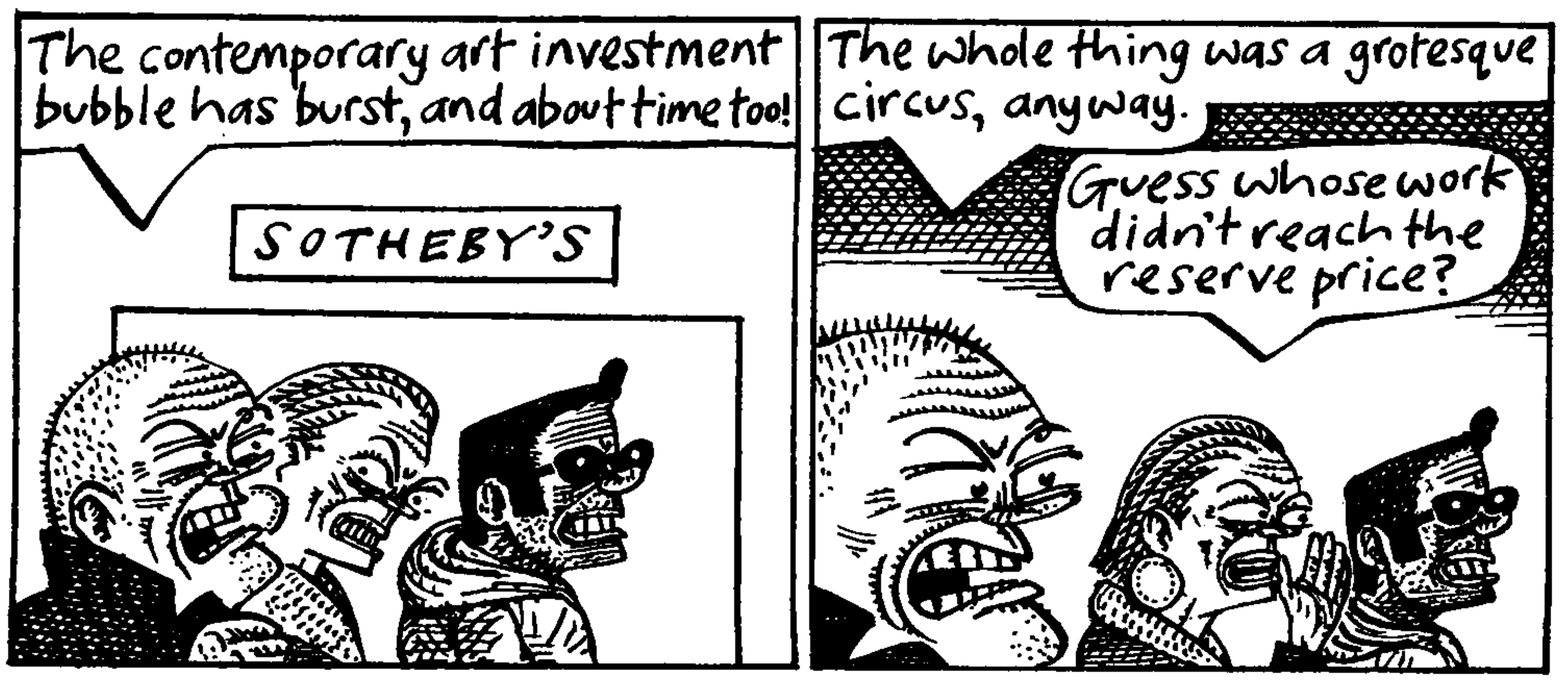
INTO has snapped up several lucrative joint-venture contracts, including taking over English language provision at Newcastle and Exeter universities (*Eye* 1180), and is also in talks with Goldsmiths in London and Queen's University Belfast. The new buildings involved are developed and owned by INTO's property arm and then leased, PFI-style, to a joint venture between INTO and the university.

INTO threatened to sue the lecturers' union, the UCU, in July after it published a briefing that was highly critical of INTO. The union removed the briefing from its website, replacing it with a collection of quotes given by INTO chairman Andrew Colin in interviews, including "rates of pay [for INTO staff] are probably worse" and "INTO is going to make money out of the buildings".

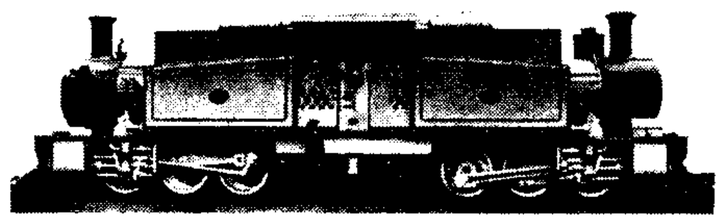
UCU general secretary Sally Hunt welcomed news that the Essex deal had been abandoned, saying: "We are not prepared to watch our universities risk hard-won reputations and future financial health by signing capital and revenue over to what are, in effect, private sector property developers."

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


The contemporary art investment bubble has burst, and about time too!
SOTHEBY'S
The whole thing was a grotesque circus, anyway.
Guess whose work didn't reach the reserve price?

SIGNAL FAILURES



BIG FIRMS which used this summer's high oil prices as an excuse to raise bus fares (*Eye* 1216) weren't so quick to cut fares as oil has dropped to its lowest price in 14 months.

"Like all road users, Arriva is feeling the impact of increasing fuel costs," explained one manager last summer when in fact Arriva was paying less for most of its diesel than last year thanks to a bulk-buy deal. Other road users have seen prices rise and fall; bus passengers have seen fares rise and, er, that's it.

Not that they can expect any help from Gordon Brown. He threatened to call in the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) if petrol prices didn't fall but apparently doesn't realise or care that many of Britain's poorest people who rely on buses have been clobbered with fare rises this year by firms which mostly have local monopolies.

While Brown wants cheaper motoring, his rail policy is that regulated (ie government-controlled) fares must rise every year by inflation plus 1 percent (3 percent on Southeastern). Inflation is measured by July's RPI (5 percent this year) so commuters can expect a 6 percent fare rise (8 percent on Southeastern) come January.

WHAT's the point of the National Audit Office's *Letting Rail Franchises 2005-2007* report? It tells us the eight franchises let entirely by the Department for Transport (DafT) so far are better value than those awarded by the Strategic Rail Authority, which everyone knew was woeful (*Eyes passim*).

For an "independent" auditor, NAO was surprisingly reluctant to challenge DafT assertions and assumptions and its biggest omission was taking franchises as a fact of life, not a hurried concoction by the outgoing Tory government and its advisers who saw that there was money to be made. NAO ignores growing profit extraction from franchises, eg £24m last year for Richard Branson. And it doesn't mind that every bid for a new franchise costs £3m to £5m per bidder (excluding DafT's costs), although bidders recoup their outlay through fares.

Comparing our franchises with non-franchised railways would show how a £9bn budget (England and Wales only) could provide a railway with more capacity and cheaper fares. But even in a recession, NAO and government refuse to go there.

GLOBAL capitalism may be teetering but it can still bite, as residents of Sittingbourne, Kent, are discovering.

For 300 years paper making was one of the town's principal activities and a narrow-gauge railway carried goods and workers to and from the paper mills at Sittingbourne and nearby Kemsley. The railway's viaduct, built in the 1920s, is one of Britain's earliest structures of pre-stressed concrete.

Finnish multinational M-real took over the mills in 1998 and closed Sittingbourne mill last year. The quirky little steam trains, which have become the town's main tourist attraction since volunteers took them over in 1970, must stop on Boxing Day because M-real wants to flog Sittingbourne mill and viaduct (not a listed building despite its engineering significance) to developers after commissioning a blueprint for a "mixed use" scheme of up to 900 units.

By late January all the buildings and trains, some of which are over 100 years old, must be cleared away. People trying to save the railway, including the local council and parliamentarians, might like to read M-real's corporate-responsibility policy, which states: "M-real's units are active members of their local communities. Their local involvement is diverse and includes numerous activities, such as cooperation with schools and universities, decision-makers, politicians and authorities." Yeah, right.

'Dr B. Ching'

Letters

Landing on GO

Sir,

I think I've found the inspiration for the latest Government Economic Policy. It's the rules for Monopoly.

CHRISTOPHER BOOMER,

Belfast.

Q. What happens if the Bank runs out of money?

A. The Bank never goes bankrupt. To continue playing, use slips of paper to keep track of each player's banking transactions - until the bank has enough paper money to operate again.

One in the Eye

Sir,

BBC news reports on Radio 4 from 7.30 to 9 am on Friday 17th October repeatedly said "...BBC research has discovered that Northern Rock has doubled the amount of its repossessions since being nationalised...". This item was in your latest publication – I read it on Wednesday.

I have just started to read Private Eye – usually read the Guardian, Daily Mirror, New Internationist, and Evening Standard (for a balanced view). None of these give the information you provide; particularly frightening was the piece about Mr Brown's financial advisers.

Thank you.
C. QUINN.

Via email.

Recycling news

Sir,

The picture joke on page 3 and the 'EU-phemisms' cartoon on page 10 (Eye 1221) – are they by any chance related? Or an indication that, in these belt-tightening times, punchlines, like teabags, may have to be used more than once?

Yours, in continued admiration,
a bank-owning taxpayer,
FREDERICK DOVE,

Via email.

Sir,

Re your "Crisis In Pictures" (Eye 1220) featuring a photograph of Osama bin Laden aspiring "I should have become a merchant banker!" Is it by any chance related to your post-Enron front cover of 12 July 2003: "New Osama threat to America" where the same international terrorist opines "Forget terrorism – I'm going to become an accountant."

Has the global financial meltdown finally infected the deployment of fresh satire at Private Eye or is this an excellent example of the Eye doing its bit for recycling?

TIM LOUGHTON MP,

House of Commons.

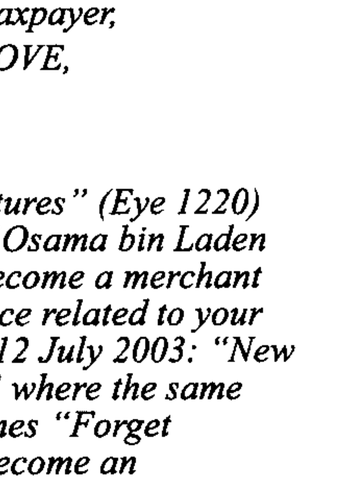
Anagram

Sir,

Anagram of Peter Mandelson = Mean old serpent.

NOMEN NESCIO,

Via email.



Community spirit

Sir,

I am surprised that the department of communities and local government claims local papers such as ours are being manipulated by Tameside Council (Rotten Boroughs, 'Blue Pencil Blues', Eye 1220) into only printing stories of which it approves.

As the main paper for Tameside I can assure readers that we do not hold regular meetings with the council to "stop sensationalist reporting", and as far as I am aware neither does our rival paper.

The example quoted – a Kick Racism Out of Football event – was published in our paper, though I have no recall of any extremist demonstration being planned.

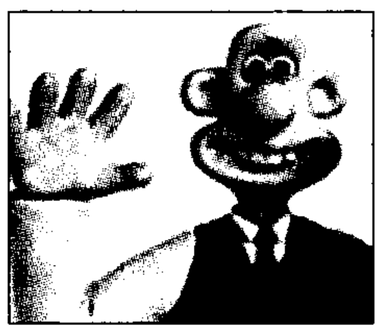
What I do remember is the BNP getting very hot under the collar about the story and accusing us of being politically correct. This is usually a term of abuse, but coming from the BNP I took it as a compliment.

Regards,
DAVID PORTER,

Editor, Tameside Advertiser.

Lookalike

Wallace



McCain

Sir,

Nick Park has a lot to answer for, methinks.

MEILIR PAGE,

Renton, Washington, USA.

Flop Idol

Sir,

Contrary to your recent article in Street of Shame (Eye 1221) Simon Cowell does not present American Idol; that dubious honour falls to Ryan Seacrest. Cowell merely sits on the judges' panel. Furthermore, American Idol is not the US version of The X-Factor but rather – duh! – Pop Idol. You really ought to stay in more.

GARY WHITTA,

Via email.

Hell for Leather

Sir,

So, Dame Suzi Leather, Chair of the Charity Commission takes a pasting from from Labour MPs (Eye 1221) about the Commission's wavering on the public benefit of charitable private schools. Instead Dame Suzi should have aimed a rocket up their backsides for failing to legislate to make the position clear.

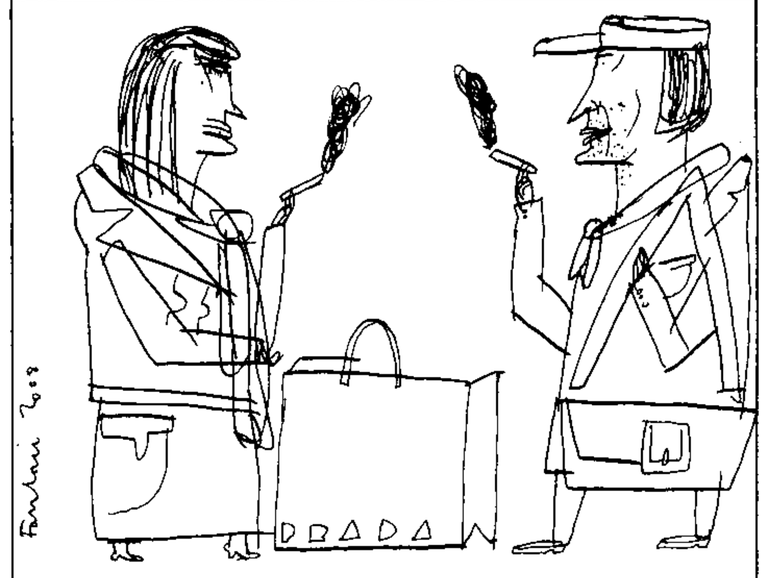
A tabled amendment to the Charities Act 2006 – which enough Labour MPs conspicuously failed to support – would have unequivically given the Charity Commission the ammunition it needs to truly hold fee charging charities to account. Instead the Charity Commission was given a hospital pass and a classic Blairite fudge. If Parliament failed – through fear of alienating the middle classes – to make the position clear, why on earth should the Commission be in a better position?

As for your comments about Dame Suzi's feminine appeal, yes she is a sexy gal but it is interesting to see that misogyny is alive and well in the pages of Private Eye. Dame Suzi is a national treasure and much loved in the charity sector.

Yours faithfully,
ROSAMUND MCCARTHY,

London N1.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Do you realise it's November and we still haven't visited Liverpool, European Capital of Culture 2008, yet?"

Pool the other one

Sir,

In view of the fact that events in Liverpool during the first nine months of the European Capital of Culture have been visited by 10 million people; that the European Commission president has called it one of the most successful Capital of Culture programmes ever and that approx £1 billion has been pumped into the local economy, I wonder if you would like to revise your ill-judged comments that the whole thing was going to be an absolute disaster.

JOHN M. GRAHAM PhD,

Via email.

Did we mention the ad?

Sir,

I can't work out if you are pro or anti Felix Dennis (Eye 1220). Pages 18 (a parody of a poem he might have written) and 24 (Stephen Fry being a little too effusive in his praise for F.D's ouevre) say anti, but page 31 (full-page ad for the FD extravaganza tour) says pro. Or does a little bit of advertising income make all the difference?

You going along to hear the King of Titillation recite?

ROBERT NOWICKI,

Via email.

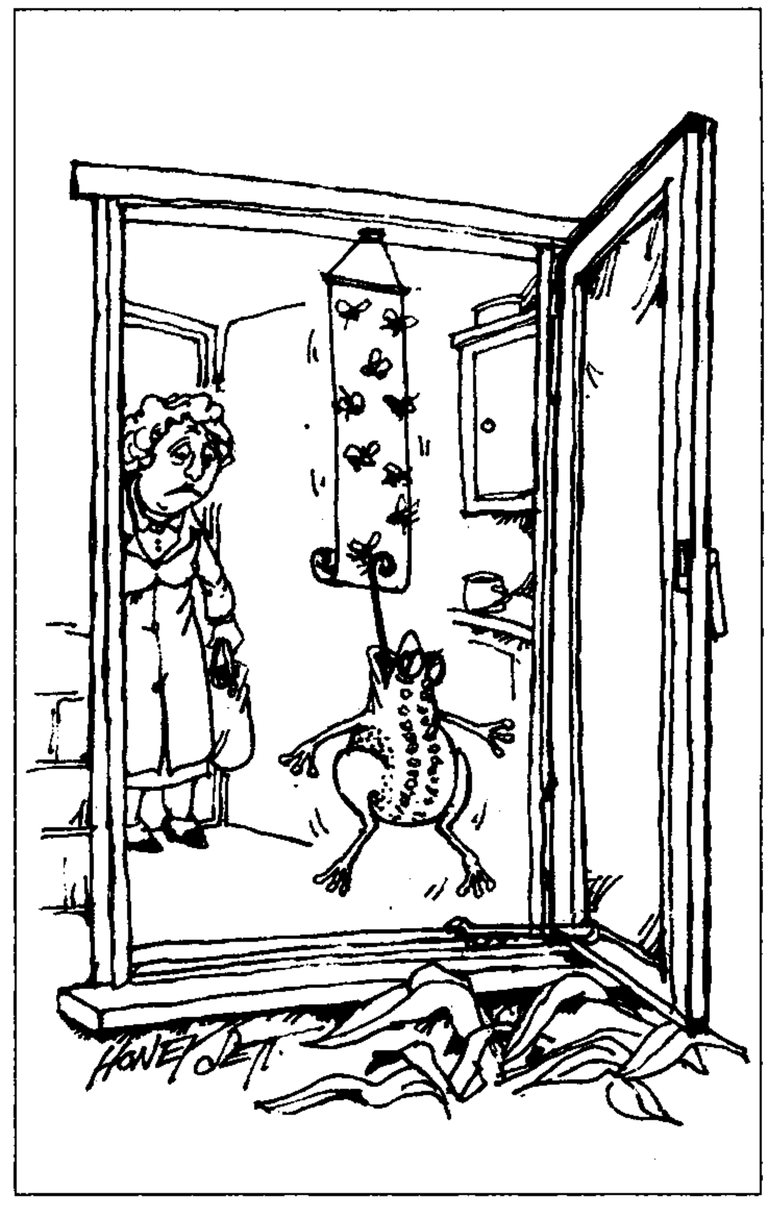


Photo opportunity

Sir,

As the year draws on, I gather that pensioners are being encouraged to make the most of shared warmth to prevent their body temperature dropping. Is your august organ able to illustrate best practice for keeping it up this winter?

MARK O'LEARY,

Via email.

Kelly's zeroes

Sir,

It is significant that in his condemnation of the Eye's recent exposures of the murky connections of the SNP and Islam (Ratbiter bitten, Eye 1221), William Kelly cannot give a single instance of Ratbiter being, er, wrong in any of his assertions.

Instead he drifts off into the totally irrelevant Iraq and WMD questions and suggests it's a Labour Press Office fix of some kind.

May I say as a member of no political party that there are many in Scotland – perhaps the vast majority – who positively welcomed Ratbiter's incisive and devastating reports. The SNP and Alex Salmond have been given a virtual free hand by a supine media in Scotland and in some cases even report SNP handouts as news, down to the last comma.

Exposing cant and hypocrisy is what Private Eye does best of all.

ALEXANDER McKAY,

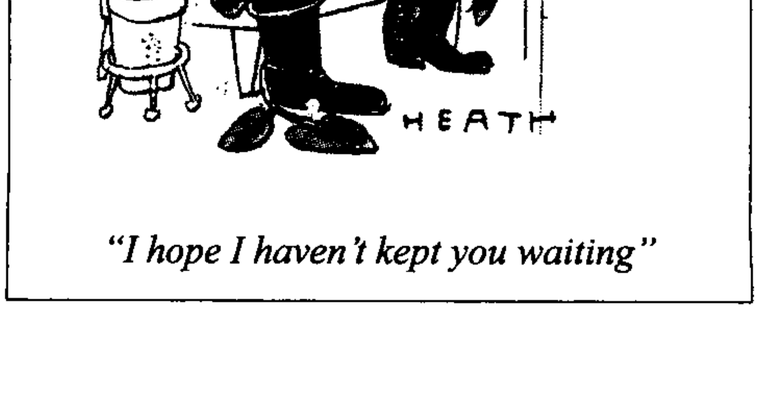
Edinburgh.

Sir,

Re A-K the Noo! (Eye 1220). Surely it is no surprise that John Mason leaps to the support of Pakistan. A state where central government lets remote mountainous regions be autonomous almost to the point of independence, allowing them to be self-governed by local Thanes funded by local entrepreneurs with aggressive approaches to dealing with competing enterprises (and bus magnates!) is what all SNP members would view as a model arrangement!

Yours,
DON CALE,

Harringey.



"I hope I haven't kept you waiting"

Alba quirky

Sir,

What was the point of your rather odd half-article on the birth of BBC Alba (Media News, Eye 1220)? You state only three things: that it has been launched, that it's costing £14m, and that Gaelic is an endangered language.

You left out the obvious conclusion that the BBC and MG Alba are to be congratulated for throwing a cultural lifeline to one of the indigenous languages of this country. Whilst there are other grounds for optimism, such as the phenomenal popularity of the Glasgow Gaelic School, which is 150 percent over-subscribed, this latest development is long overdue. Enough public money has been spent down the years suppressing the language. This is a drop in the financial bucket at the best of times, but in the light of the financial bail-out it's almost infinitesimal.

To avoid making clear your views on BBC Alba is to leave it open to readers to interpret that you disapprove, and are happy, in effect, to participate in the death of an ancient and beautiful language.

Yours,
PAUL COYNE,

Glasgow.

Anagram

Sir,

Knowing how much you chaps like descriptive anagrams I felt I had to share my discovery that "Sarah Palin Vice President" is an anagram of "Is perhaps devil incarnate".

So it must be true.
TREVOR P. HIRST,

Via email.

Fan zone

Sir,

I must complain about the puerile making-up of football signatures. Why, some of them are not even accurate.

BRIAN N. HOVEALBION,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

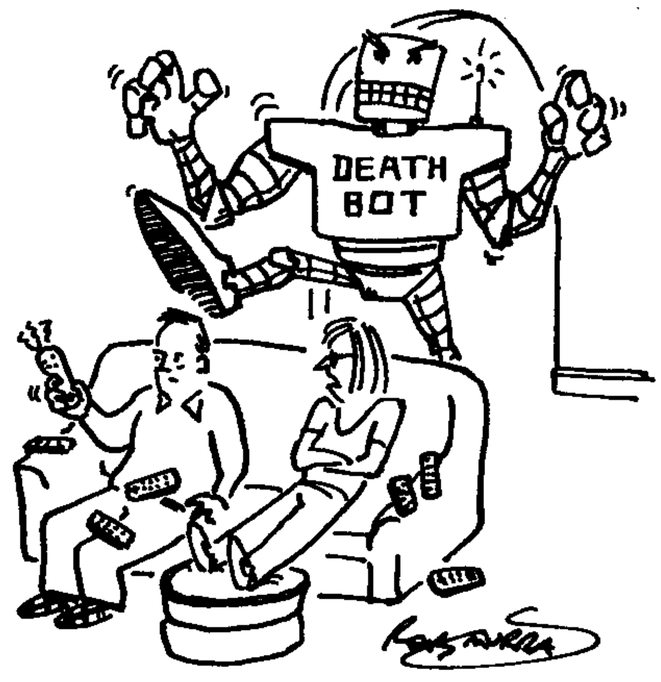
Louise Minchin: *What is it like to have Sir Cliff Richard promoting this project?*
Alzheimer Society spokeswoman: *Well, dementia has been in the shadows for a long time...*
Sunday Life, BBC1
(Bernard McGuin)

"So the obvious answer is 'why?'"
JOHN HUMPHRYS, Radio 4
(Richard Holland)

"I don't know what state of mind his body is in."
JAMIE REDKNAPP, Sky Sports
(J. Pugh)

"I'd never danced before. I've literally got two left feet."
CHRISTINE BLAKELY, Radio 5 Live
(Martin Macari)

"Some of this stuff is political with Max Mosley. I mean, some people use the story as a stick to beat him with..."
NICKY CAMPBELL, Radio 5 Live
(Neill Child)



"I've given up trying to work out what that one does"

Sir,

I have always been a rugger bugger, not a football fan. Imagine my joy when I met and married Ms Rosalind Park.

Now though she is sadly Mrs Rosalind House-Muir. Which does not work anymore.

Yours,
STAN HOUSE-MUIR.

Sir,

Who does Ken Tuckyfriedchicken think he is fooling? No more subliminal fast food product placements, please?

PETE ZAHUT (retired).

Pedantry Corner

*... Re the "On me 'ead, son" cartoon (Eye 1221). Come the revolution there will be a special section of wall reserved for all illustrators – including cartoonists – who have ever portrayed the Greek god Atlas as carrying the **Earth** on his shoulders. He did in fact (well, in myth) support the **heavens** on his shoulders. After all, if he was supposed to be supporting the Earth, what would he be standing on?*

Among the myths that surround Atlas is the legend of Perseus turning Atlas to stone by showing him the head of the Gorgon Medusa, the physical manifestation of which is supposedly the Atlas Mountains in north-west Africa, which is of course part of the Earth.

PETER ANDERTON.

... With regards to It's Grim Up North London (Eye 1221), I would agree that i-Player is indeed amazing. However rewinding only takes you back to the start, and you most certainly can't slo-mo. Please can I be in Pedants Corner?

JOHN ELLERKER.

... You say (Eye 1221) the motto originally suggested for the Mandelson coat of arms was Salve Nauticus! The adjective, which means "seafaring", may indeed be used in its masculine form with an understood noun, but usually only in the plural (nautici -nauticos etc.) for seafaring men or sailors. For "sailor" (singular) one would expect nauta, well known to all those who cut their teeth (dentes) on a Latin Primer. But perhaps that word and the motto were rejected because nauta is one of the few First Declension nouns which are feminine in form but masculine in gender – the grammatical equivalent of a drag artist.

JOHN DEANE.

In the article "Concrete Jungle" (Eye 1221), I notice the use of the word "decanting". This seems to be a popular word used to describe the movement of people by some organisation or other. It is regularly used to describe the movement of pupils into new schools.

When applied to a good wine, does it not describe the retention of the best bits whilst leaving behind the dregs?!!!

JOHN MORGAN.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The results of our computer prediction have serious implications for the fairness of our justice system," Stamos Karamouzis of Regis University's School of Computer and Information Sciences told reporters in Denver. "By linking 18 computer processors together, we have been able to analyse data about a thousand prisoners on Death Row, and predict with an accuracy of 92% which ones will be executed. What we have found is that the severity of the crime doesn't matter, nor does a prisoner's race, sex, or age. Rather, the most reliable forecaster of a prisoner's fate is their level of education. The lower that is, the more likely they are to be executed."

Karamouzis was demonstrating a new computer system which "analyses data in the way that a human brain does," but others

disagreed with his findings. "Once a person is given the death penalty, it's fairly easy to predict who gets executed," said Richard Dieter of the Death Penalty Information Center. "The best predictor is the state in which a person is convicted. In states like Texas and Virginia, chances are that your death penalty case will be upheld and you'll be executed. In California, chances are you'll get a reversal during the appeals process or you'll be in jail until you die. That's because California has an even mix of Republicans, who tend to favour capital punishment, and Democrats, who tend to oppose it. So the state has retained the death penalty, but is unlikely to use it." *(Scientific American, 3/7/08. Spotter: David Dallison)*

– o –

"*I am still the political candidate who is best suited to the governor's job," Chuwit Kamolvisit told a press conference in Bangkok, "so don't use this one incident as a standard to judge me. I lost my temper on television because the interviewer insulted my manliness. I'm a person who takes no abuse from anyone, so I hit him very hard. And I felt super after doing it. A man like me can be killed, but I cannot be insulted. You play hard with me, then I will pay you back for what you did, and that is my motto."*

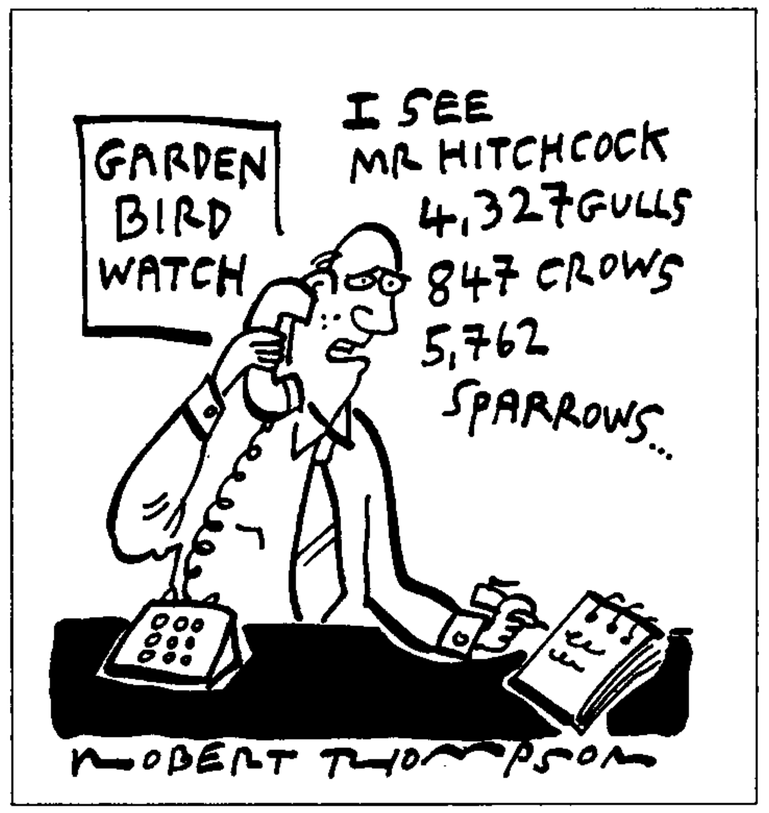
Earlier, Visarn Dilokwanich (a Channel 3 television news presenter) had explained what had happened. "I was hosting a live debate between all the candidates for the job of city governor. I politely asked them all some tough policy questions, but Chuwit seemed increasingly upset by them. He evaded my questions, then as the show was ending, he walked right up to me and punched me in the face. Then he hit me in the ear and the back of the neck with his elbow. I fell down, and my head hit the floor, but he carried on kicking me in the back and legs. I did not hit back because I am not a thug."

Visarn later filed an assault complaint against Chuwit. A spokesman tried to play down the affair by observing "the maximum punishment for assault is only a one-month jail term, so Chuwit remains an eligible candidate for the post of city governor." (Bangkok Post, 3/10/08. Spotter: Paul Sumner)

– o –

"Deputy US Marshall John Vebber travelled to Crandon jail to collect a prisoner who had burglarized a post office. He intended to take him to court, but came away empty-handed, for the following reason.

"Although the outer walls of the jail in Crandon appear to be made of concrete blocks, they are not. They are actually made of thin tin, painted and furrowed to look like concrete. An investigation has concluded that the imposing-looking wall of the jail had been cut open from outside, probably with a simple can opener. A hole had then been punched through the lath and plaster inside, and an entrance big enough to drive a team of horses through was made in the wall. Once inside, the rescuer opened the doors of all the cells, and all of the prisoners escaped. None have yet been caught. When repairing the damage, it is strongly recommended that real concrete blocks should be used, not just painted ones." *(The Forest Republican, 27/8/08. Spotter: Tim Raylor)*



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Scout leaders to offer sex advice

first thing they give them in the scouts is a knife, now they r giving them condoms ● y not give them guns and crack while there at it? – ***Broken_Britan***

India enters space race

I know all about The Restaurant at the End of the Universe. Now it's The Takeaway on the Moon! lol!– ***Jeremy Hitchhiker***

Most Indians are already "over the moon" about Sachin Tendulkar's test match run record! Now they'll never come back "down to Earth"! But seriously, if they want to race in space, good luck to them. – ***Twelfth_man***

lets hope abdul the astranought smuggle's his children, wive's, parent's and all his illegal aunt's, uncle's and cousin's onto the rocket. send the lot of them into space theres no space left here. – ***Red_White_and_True***

in that film of the men on the moon its all in america and they speak american? so how can they get the moon in india, is that wat satilites r for? – ***Hayley_321***

Murray wins Madrid Masters

Well done Andy! ☺ Well done Murray Maniac too for sucking all those Murray Mints through the tournament – they did the trick! I see Sir Alan Sugar is now calling on everyone to buy British, and you don't get more British than a Murray Mint – so keep on sucking for Britain! ☺ ☺ – ***Where's_Your_Henman_Hat?***

I'm bursting with pride! And I'm bursting with Murray Mints!! I absolutely WILL carry on for Andy and Britain!!! – ***Murray_Maniac***

same old murry insult-ing our dead hero's, as usual not wear-ing a poppy during any of his match's. lewis hamleton just as bad, coverd in sponsers logo's but no room for a poppy. die u scum. – ***No_Justice_UK***

apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
EYESIGHT: SOME HELPFUL SELF-DIAGNOSTIC TESTS
if you can read these words most clearly...
IF YOU CAN READ THESE WORDS MOST CLEARLY...
YOU HAVE SHORT SIGHT
YOU HAVE LONG SIGHT
if you can read these words most clearly...
...
YOU HAVE ASTIGMATISM
YOU HAVE SECOND SIGHT

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 30

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

The Supreme leader and Comrade Lord Mandelson in sombre mood as they contemplate the coming recession

Comrades,

It is distressing that at this time of global crisis when the economies of the world teeter on the edge of collapse (entirely because of the Americans) that our national media should feel they have nothing better to do than focus obsessively on the dubious holiday antics of a tiny group of overprivileged capitalist parasites.

Let us not waste any more time on the internal squabblings of the tophatted neo-Conservative Bullingdon claque and the petty vengeful tit-for-tatism of the cosmopolitan banker Rothschild.

It would be easy to accuse Mr Osborne of sycophantic grovelling to a notoriously corrupt and over-powerful multi-billionaire oligarch who has grown fat on the carcasses of the downtrodden Russian proletariat in the hope of extracting seedy largesse to finance his pitiful political manoeuvrings against the Supreme Leader.

And may I point out that there are no oligarch's yachts off the austere coast of Southwold where my simple holiday dacha stands on the windswept shore, affording every recuperative facility that a dedicated public servant could wish for? Not for your Supreme Leader the sybaritic sun-kissed villas of the rich and decadent in the fleshpots of Corfu.

Still, in the light of the world crisis, this is a mere sideshow and we should ignore it.

Nevertheless, Mr Osborne's conduct is clearly a flagrant breach of the law and constitutes a prima facie criminal offence.

That is why as a matter of the highest national priority I am calling for a full-scale public enquiry into Mr Osborne's blatant act of High Treason against the State.

Surely, comrades, the temporary problems afflicting the world's economies, all of which I have fully under control, pale into insignificance alongside the heinous malfeasances of the unscrupulous jumped-up Cameronite lickspittle **OSBORNE**.

Small wonder then that in the light of these shameful revelations the British people are once again reaffirming their loyalty to, and unbridled admiration for, the wise and all-seeing judgement of their Supreme Leader, myself.

Signed

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Lender

BIG SISTER IS WATCHING YOU!

Comrade Smith, Security Commissar, writes:

All Comrades are hereby advised that all of their personal communications will be liable to be intercepted by state security officials, whether phone calls, emails, texts or personal one-to-one conversations in their own home. This is vital for the defence of the state against the ever present and increasing threat of terrorist organisations attempting to spread anarchy. Objections from old, out-moded and old-fashioned liberal theorists must be ignored in these new and dangerous circumstances. How can Comrades ever hope to be free unless they are under 24-hour surveillance?

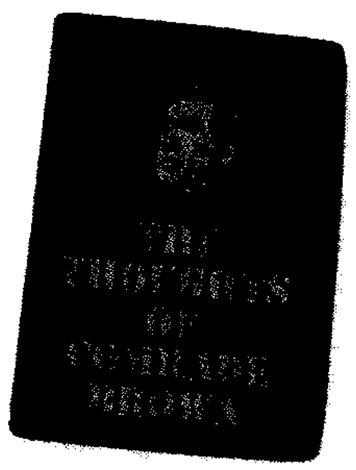
Commissar Smith,
Room 101,
The In-Your-Home Office,
Whitehall.

■ May I take this opportunity to draw your attention to my shrewdness and foresight in recalling my very old friend and ally Comrade Lord Mandelson to high office in the Politburo. No sooner had he returned than he delivered a death blow to my opponents by exposing their secret links to a shady Russian businessman. And congratulations to Lord Comrade Mandelson for his brilliant ingenuity in cultivating the friendship of Mr Deripaska over many months solely in order to entrap the hated playboy Osborne, the right-hand man of the bogus self-styled Friend of the Proletariat, Cameron. G.B.

Here Comrade Lord Mandelson is seen donning the garb of a humble tractor driver as he takes his seat in the Workers House of Lords

"Both a borrower and a lender be"

Taken from Chapter 21, 'Saving The Capitalist Banking System From The Consequences Of Its Own Criminal Follies'



GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's Favourite Dollygarch!

■ HATS OFF to fearless Fern Britton!?! She's the fun-loving fatso who is not ashamed to tell the world about her Gastric Band!?!! *(What's that? Ed.)* Hang on, I'm coming to that – it's stapling up your tummy to stop all the cake getting into your gut!?! *(Thanks. I always wanted to know. Ed.)* Anyway, as I was saying, *This Morning*'s once Ten-Ton Tessa is now Beanpole Bessie and it's all down to that lil' ol' Gastric Band!?! Can you hear them playing?! Is it "Food, Glorious Food" they are strummin'?! No sirree!? More like "Tea For None"!? Geddit?

■ FATTY FERN!?! What a disgrace!?! Pretendin' she's been a-slimmin' and a-trimmin' with just a few crumbs of Ryvita to keep her going through the gruellin' task of presenting *This Morning*!?! And all the time her dramatic weight loss was down to an elastic band twisted round her gut to stop the cake going down!? *(Alright. We've done this bit. Ed.)* Role model?! More like a Roly-Poly Pudding model!?! Do us all a favour, Fern!?! And staple up your gob rather than your gut!?! Geddit?!

■ JOHN PRESCOTT!? Doesn't it make you sick?!? And I'm not talkin' about bulimia!?! (Geddit?) The two-Jag, two-shag, croquet-playing philanderer and two-bit tough guy has been given a job on the BBC!? And what's he doing?!? Telling *us* about class!?! The Deputy Prime Minister wouldn't know class if it came up and hit him!?! In fact he'd probably hit it back!?! Clear off, Prezza, get back in one of your Jags and drive off Beachy Head!?!

■ THREE CHEERS for plucky John Prescott!?! OK, so he's made a fool of himself from time to time in the past – but now he's got a fresh start and has had the guts to say "yes" to the BBC and do a programme on class!?! And why not? Bighearted Prezza has got more class than all the Milibands, Balls, Camerons, Osbornes and other sorry wannabes put together!?! You get *my* vote, John – you've been to Hull and back!?! Geddit?

■ *WARNING, Mister!? Get your Kleenex out!?! Cos Billie Piper's just had a little 'un!?! All together!?! Aaah!?! And who's that a-droolin' and a-dribblin'?!? Not the tiny tot, stoopid, it's carrot-haired Chris Evans, Billie's creepy ex!?!! Take a tip from Aunty Glenda, Chris!?! Get in Prezza's car and join him in a one-way trip off Beachy Head!?!* (Have you been drinking again? Ed.) *OK, so I have – doesn't everyone at ten o'clock in the morning?! I've been out with troubled Kerry Katona!? What a gal!?! Who is she again?* (You're fired. Ed.)

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Halloween Rumpy-Pumpkins!?!

● **Oleg Deripaska.** Fancy a bit of olegover round at my place?!

● **Juande Ramos.** So you couldn't score and you got the sack?! Jump into my sack and score any time!?!

● **Benjamin Wegg-Prosser.** Crazy name, crazy guy!?!!!

Byeee!!

"You are NOT going out like that. You'll give someone a heart attack if they open the door and see you dressed as a banker"

"The fifth? Yes, that's good for me. Is the fifth good for you, Guy?"

Advertisement

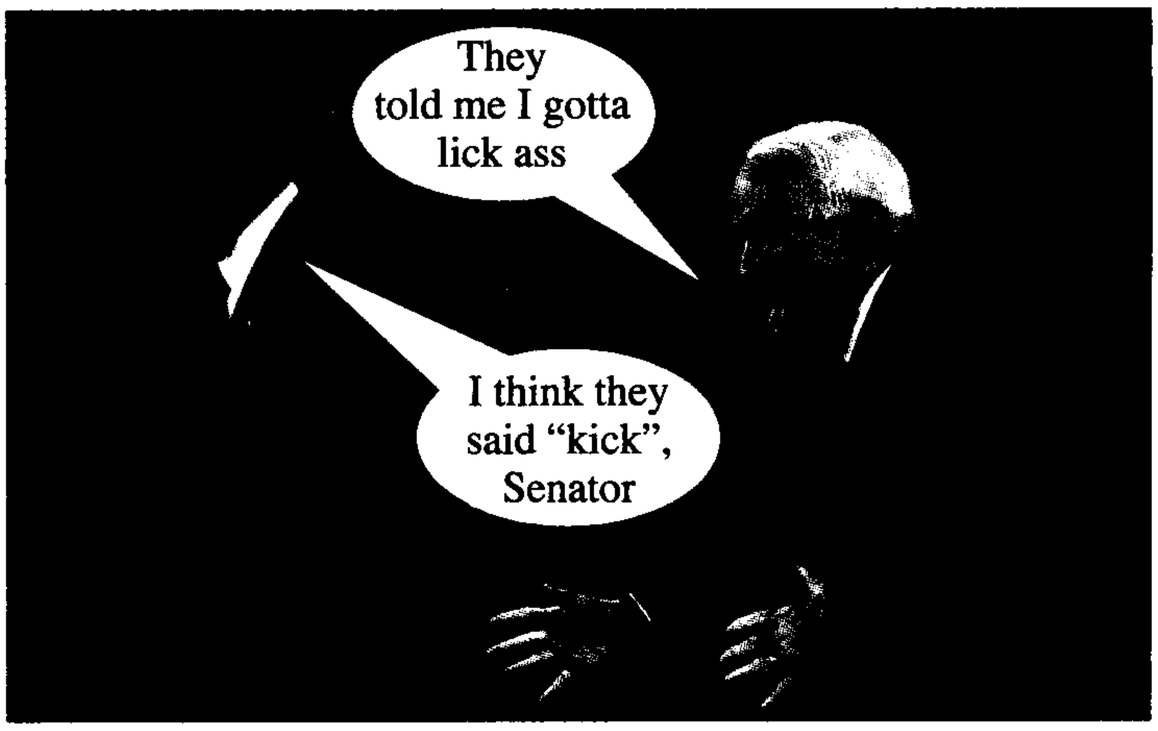
DIRTY PHONE LINES
THE BEST HOT-FILTH FREE FROM THE BBC
ADULTS AND CHILDREN ONLY

Listen to Wossy and Wussell as they get sexually excited at the thought of being rude to an old man and his granddaughter! Hear them use graphic language as they get turned on by abusing their positions at the BBC!! And hear them climax in pleasure as they get away scot free with a criminal offence!

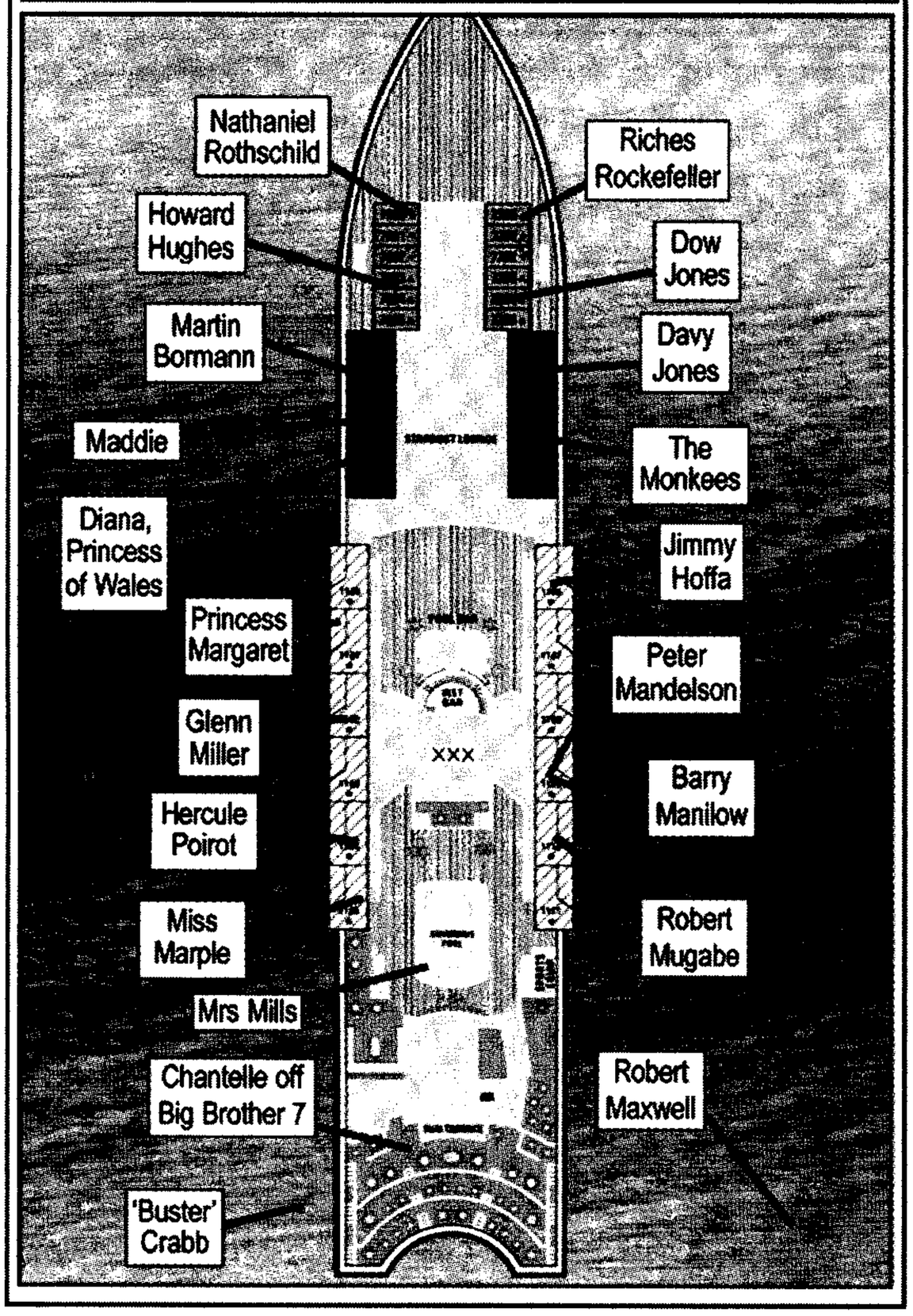
NO CORRECTION!!
NO DISCIPLINE!! NO PUNISHMENT!!

To hear more filth just tune in to BBC Radio Blue 88-91 MHz

McCAIN SALUTES OBAMA



Just who else was on board *that* yacht?



What You Are Reading

The Gripes Of Rothschild by John Fastbuck
IT IS the time of the Great Depression and impoverished Conservatives take the long road to Corfu in the desperate search to find money of any kind.

Look Back In Agnie by George Osborne
ANGRY young man George Osborne sits in Cafe Agnie in Corfu and rails against the Establishment.

Exclusive to all Sunday Newspapers

YACHTGATE

We ask the questions that need answering

■ **What is the relationship between oligarch Oleg Deripaska and former EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson?**

■ *When did they first meet? 2004 or 2006?*

■ **What did they say? Was there a deal?**

■ *Did money change hands? If so, how much?*

■ **Is Peter Mandelson guilty of the biggest sleaze scandal of all time?**

If you know the answers to any of these questions please let us know. Because we have no idea. We are too busy compiling lists of questions.

Isn't It Terrible The Way Politicians Are So Greedy For Money?

Asks Max Hastings

IT IS sickening to read yet again of our sleazy money-grubbing politicians buzzing around millionaires like flies on a dung heap. *(Note to editor: You did say three grand, didn't you? M.H.)*.

Can they not see how unattractive this behaviour appears to decent honest hard-working people like myself? *(Is this enough? M.H.) Not if you want your three grand. Ed.)*

I was talking to a banking friend while we were shooting last Wednesday and he said how pathetic it was that these politicians were so desperate to mix with rich people from the City. *(Will this do? M.H. No. Keep going. Ed.)*

Why can't they just do the job they are paid for instead of scrounging off rich people like my good friend Lord Rothermere?

© Hastingstrashforcash 2008

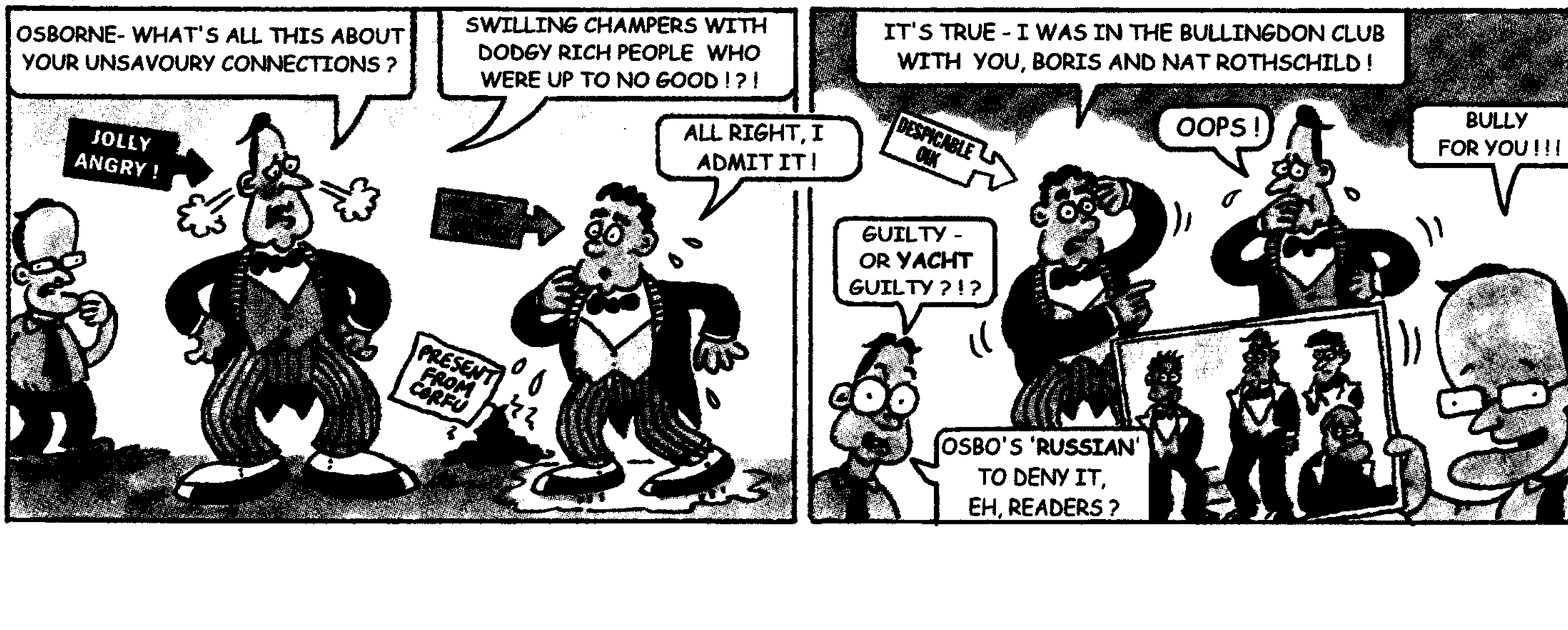
TREASURE ISLAND TIMES

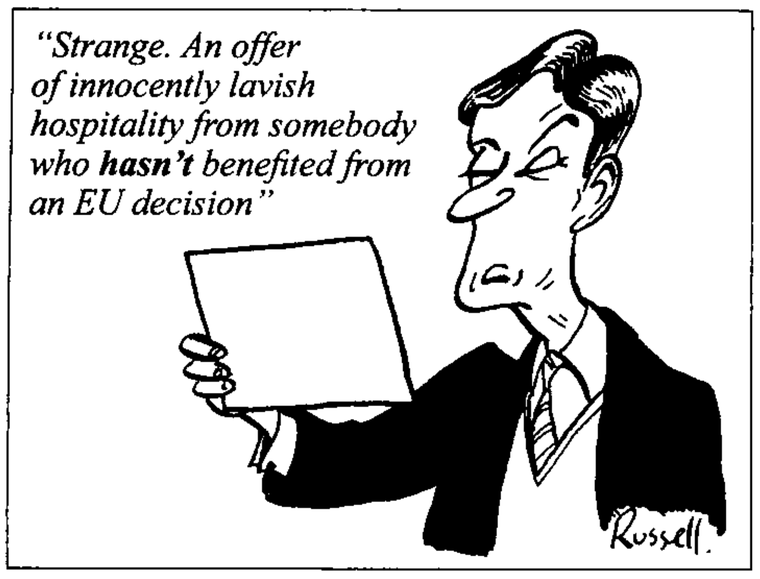
Jim Hawkins: No inappropriate behaviour took place

YOUNG Jim Hawkins has insisted that no inappropriate behaviour took place during his time on 'The Hispaniola' when it was moored off Corfu in the summer.

"I did meet Mr L.J. Silver whilst aboard his luxury boat, and we did talk in general about Captain Flint's chest, but I can assure everyone I did not expect, nor recieve, any pieces of eight,"said the young lad, clearly shaken by the experience of mixing with notorious pirates aboard the ship such as Silver, Nathaniel Rothschild and Peter Mandelson *(cont. p94)*

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


OSBORNE- WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT YOUR UNSAVOURY CONNECTIONS ?
JOLLY ANGRY !
SWILLING CHAMPERS WITH DODGY RICH PEOPLE WHO WERE UP TO NO GOOD ! ? !
ALL RIGHT, I ADMIT IT !
PRESENT FROM CORFU
IT'S TRUE - I WAS IN THE BULLINGDON CLUB WITH YOU, BORIS AND NAT ROTHSCHILD !
DESPICABLE OIK
OOPS !
BULLY FOR YOU ! ! !
GUILTY - OR YACHT GUILTY ? ! ?
OSBO'S 'RUSSIAN' TO DENY IT, EH, READERS ?



The Letter That Left Osborne's Career In Ruins

Sir, Normally I would not dream of writing a letter to the newspapers but I am so shocked by the recent behaviour of one of my summer guests at my villa in Corfu that I have decided to break the habit of a lifetime.

I am referring to the infamous conduct of my very much ex-friend the Rt Hon George Osborne. I realise that times have changed but some of us like to think that there is still a code amongst gentlemen. What took place in and around my villa last September was private and should concern no one except those involved, which is why I am writing to tell your readers and indeed the world exactly what happened.

Osborne, like the total cad that he is, came back to England and blabbed to some ghastly journalist that his fellow guest, my very good friend Peter Mandelson (who, although he bats for the other side, is a thoroughly decent fellow) was being far from flattering in his personal references to the Prime Minister. It was unforgivable of Osborne to pass on this tittle-tattle which he had only heard in the strictest confidence over brandy and cigars at the villa.

This wretched bounder then made it worse by further revealing that Lord Mandelson had been for drinks on the yacht *Chernobyl II* owned by yet another of my good friends Oleg Filthirichski, the Russian aluminium-to-coffins magnate.

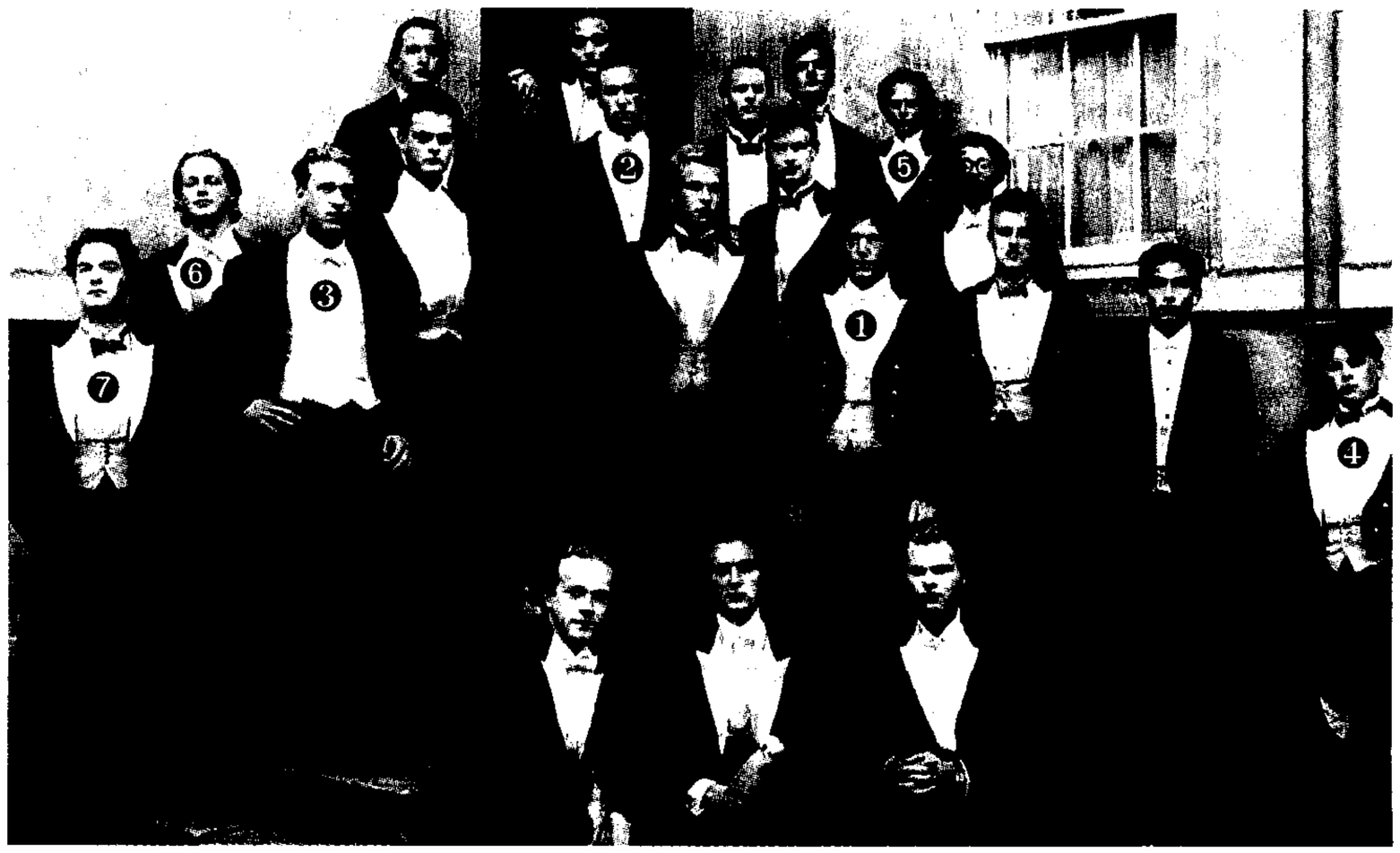
What Osborne failed to mention was that he was no stranger to the *Chernobyl II*, having on no fewer than five occasions rowed across in a dinghy in the middle of the night to implore our Russian friend to chip in a few million roubles to the Tory fighting fund.

Osborne even suggested that they could get round the law by paying the money through one of Mr Filthirichski's British companies, the Mayfair and Paddington Steam Laundering Service ("Make It Quick, Make It Clean!"), so that no one would suspect that something fishy was going on.

None of this need ever have come to light but for Osborne's failure to observe the golden rule – "What a chap says to another chap when he's at another chap's house should jolly well remain a secret between the chaps in question."

N. ROTHSCHILD, London

(Signed by P. Mandelson in Mr Rothschild's absence)



Bullingdon revisited

WHO are they, the magic circle of bright young men from Oxford who now form the nucleus of the modern Conservative Party? From right to far right:

❶ **Nat "Pratt" Rothschild:** Son of Lord Ephraim Rothschild, nephew of Lady Victoria Starborgling de Rothschild, not to be confused with his cousin Lady Vittoria Starborgling di Rothschildi or his second cousin twice removed La Comtesse de Mouton-Rothschild, Premier Cru 1923, serve at room temperature, ideal with game and cheese. Now on sale at Asda at £4.99 – Offer of the Month.

❷ **Cosmo Ricketson-Smythe:** Younger brother of Prince Harry's best friend Rupert "Legless" Ricketson-Smythe. Owns "Cosmo's", the trendy Tangier nightclub, in partnership with Sebastian Cholmondely-Flyte *(see below)*. Old Etonian and close confidant and family friend of David and Samantha Cameron.

❸ **Lord William (Billy) de Winceyette**: Younger son of the Marquess of Bilgewater. Deals in fine art at Vronski and Warminster of Bond Street. Old Etonian who runs fundraising dinners for the Tories in the North West.

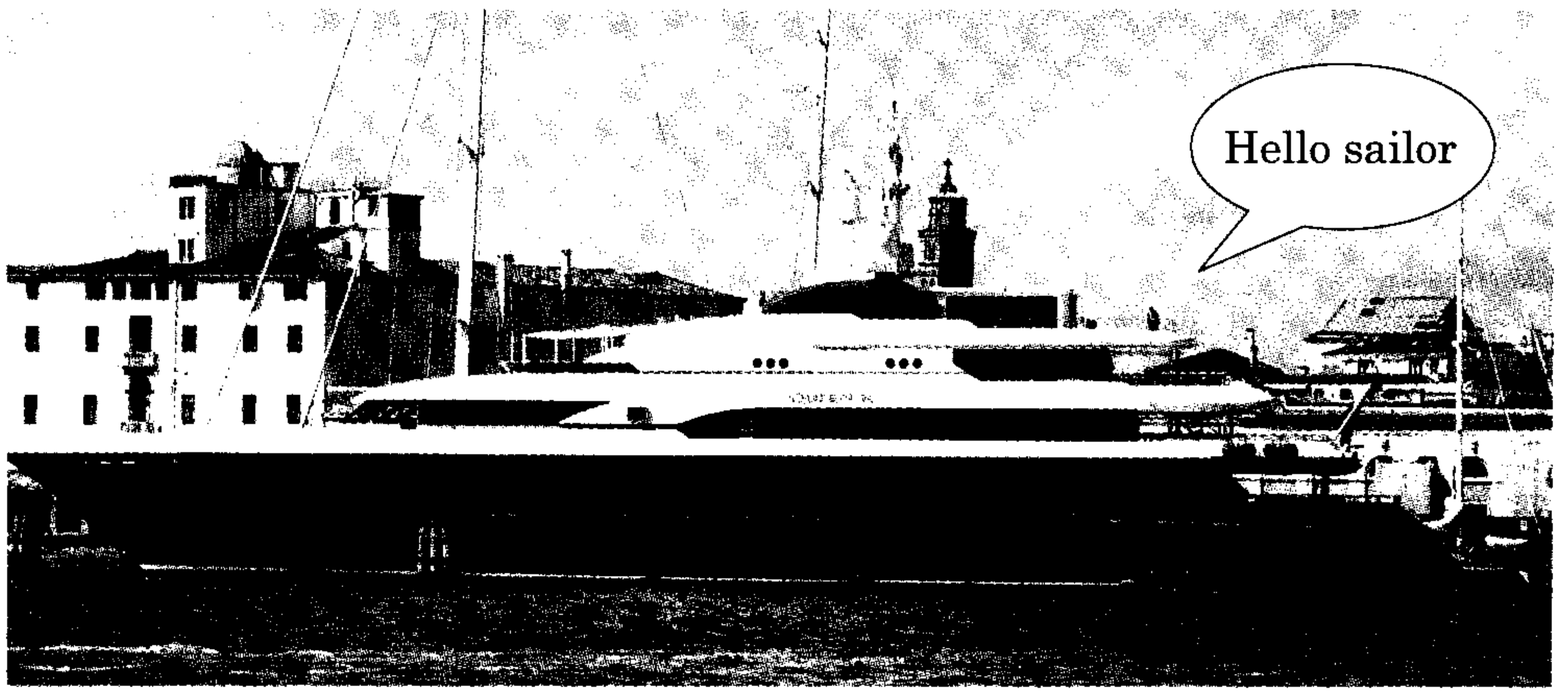
❹ **Sir Algy Bunce (Bt):** Racehorse trainer, son of the legendary Archie Bunce, the former chief steward at Newmarket. He is 179th on the Forbes Rich List and advises the Conservative Party on which horse to back in the 4.30. Old Etonian.

❺ **Algernon ffitch-Stoat-Corby:** Scion of the Corby trouser-press dynasty. Runs US hedge fund Forceps Brothers and is estimated to have a personal fortune of £800 billion. Old Etonian and deputy vice-treasurer of the Conservative Leadership Group

❻ **Harry Mount:** Old Etonian, son of Sir Ferdinand Mount, Lady Thatcher's policy advisor. His initiation into "The Buller" involved being rolled down a hill in a portable lavatory. Mount later wrote the best-selling Latin Primer *Portaloo, Portalas, Portalamus, Portalasshole*.

❼ **George "Georgie" Osborne:** Former shadow chancellor and currently garden furniture editor of *Standpoint* magazine, the Conservative quarterly run by wealthy Saudi Old Etonian Prince Abdul Bin-Laden-Twisk *(see above)*. Not an old Etonian but allowed in anyway "because we've got to have the odd oik." *(That's enough magic circle. Ed.)*

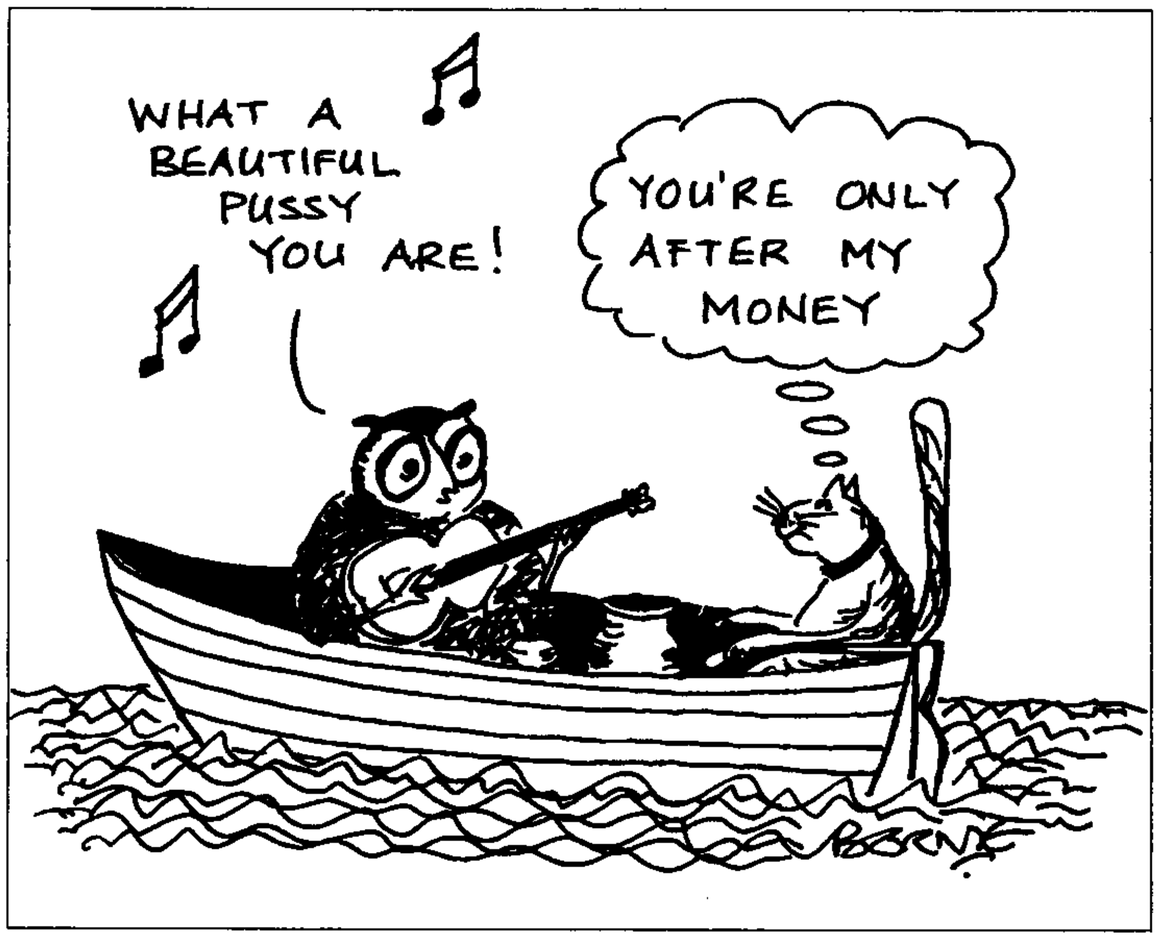
WHAT THE RUSSIAN OLIGARCH REALLY SAID TO LORD MANDELSON



Literary Agent Dies

Authors Pay Tribute To The Incredible Woman Who Enriched All Their Bank Accounts

"SHE was the most amazing woman who ever lived and her greatest achievement was to recognise just how brilliant I was. However she was an intensely private person. I knew nothing about her even though I was her best friend. She hated even to tell you what her name was. Even today I have no idea who she was." (Continued for 94 pages in all newspapers)



WHAT YOU MISSED

Little Dorritt

BBC One, 8.00pm

ADAPTED for television by Andrew Davies, Dickens' classic tale of lesbian love is ruined by a lot of dull stuff about debtors' prisons. A big disappointment to all the Dickens lovers who wanted to see more period girl-on-girl action in bonnets.

Eye rating: ★☆☆☆☆

"Apparently, if the banks don't pay top whack then senior staff will leave and go and bugger up someone else's business"

EVENING STANDARD FRIDAY 31 OCTOBER

She's back! And she's bigger-headed than ever!

Mary Ann Bighead on the rise of Portfolio Woman

Many of you are probably wondering what I'm up to these days. Well the answer is, inevitably, more than you. Yes, I am now a Portfolio Woman combining successful motherhood – of Brainella, PHd, 7 and Intelligencia, MLitt, 3 – with what I call multi-faceted career streams (or "being freelance" if you're not as clever as me!).

I am an entrepreneur, broadcaster, writer, non-executive director, wife, parent and all-round big-head! How on earth did I do it? And can you? Well, it helps to be incredibly clever, so this may rule out quite a lot of you as you won't have been a city editor, columnist, TV pundit, travel writer and holder of the Croix de Grande Tête, 1st Class awarded by the French Government, but if you are brave, bold and of course brilliant a Portfolio Life can be yours.

Just one thing – don't hide your light under a bushel. Portfolio Woman has to be prepared to tell people how much cleverer she is than everyone else – or how would they know? Not everyone reads the Evening Standard!

So my advice is "Go For It" girl! – unless you are not very clever in which case "Forget It"! I'm writing this at home, by the way, on my laptop avoiding having to go anywhere and combining working with enjoying a wonderful lifestyle that you haven't got! Clever or what? (Answer: Even cleverer than you can imagine!)

© Mary Ann Bighead *The Evening Standard 2008*

Madonna on India Knight

There are few women in public life of whom it can be said, 'She is Everywoman'. She is the epitome of the zeitgeist. She is an icon. She is the prism through which we have all lived our lives. But there is one. And we only need to invoke her first name. India. (Knight).

We have all watched her progress with amazement and awe as we tried to emulate every stage of her tumultuous career.

The marriage, the divorce, the children, the food, the column in the Sunday Times, the weight loss, the diet book, more columns in the Sunday Times... there is no doubt that India's is the story of the whole of modern womankind. An epic tale of liberation, emancipation, and the essential hard-won freedom to do whatever you like whenever you feel like it including writing utter drivel for money *(continues for 94,000 words)*

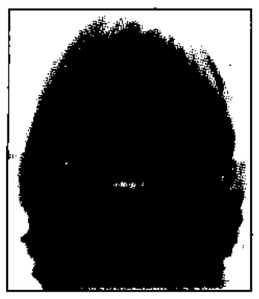
Yes! It's Guy Ritchie Mockney Rhyming Slang!

Madonna	Marriage a goner
Bugs Bunny	Who gets the money?
Rub-a-dub-dub	Too much time in the pub
Apples and pears	Malawi air fares
Barnet Fair	Another au-pair
Frog and toad	Wife always on the road
Whistle and flute	Divorce suit
Jack Tar	Had enough Kaball-ah
Dustbin lids	Who gets the kids?
Pony and trap	Films poorly received

THE EYE CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF *007* BOND *007*

Which is the best Bond girl ever? *You choose*

Mixi Mitosis who played Yummy Puss in *GoldenWonder* (1969)



Lois Bacardi who played Honey Trapp in *You Only Die On Sunday* (1973)

Tuesday Polanski who played Randy Lovechest in *Die And Don't Live* (1988)

Amanda Wheatcroft who played Eva Beaver in *Thunderbox* (1981)

Chantelle Mitterrand who played Venus Flytrap in *Yesterday Is Tomorrow* (1993)

Suki Fuki who played Bang Bang in *The Bullet Never Lies* (2001)

Olga Smirnoff who plays Anna Legova in the most recent Bond outing, *You'll Only See This Once* (2008)

(That's enough Bond girls, Ed)

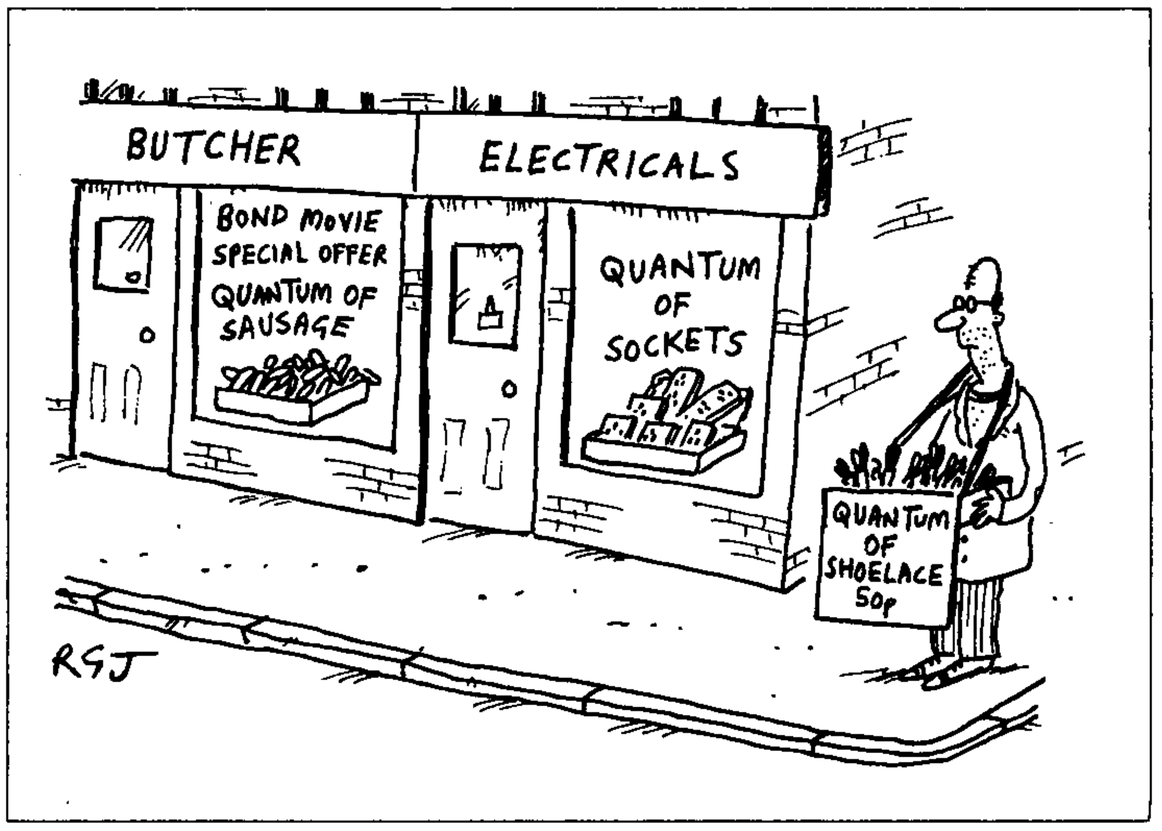
Now Try Our Bond Trivia Quiz

1. What car did Bond drive in the 1972 film *At Her Majesty's Secret Service*? Was it:
a) *Aston Martin DB10b?*
b) *Nissan Sudoku GTI?*
c) *Rolex Oyster Supermariner 713?*

2. Who played gadget boffin Q in the first 17 Bond films? Was it:
a) *Sir John Gielgud?*
b) *Sir Jonathan Miller?*
c) *Michael Fish?*

3. What cocktail does Bond order in the bar at Key Largo in *Moonwalker* (1967)? Is it:
a) *Harvey Headbanger?*
b) *Pink Geranium?*
c) *Manhattan Trouserpress?*
d) *Rolex Aston Martin?*

(That's enough quiz, Ed.)



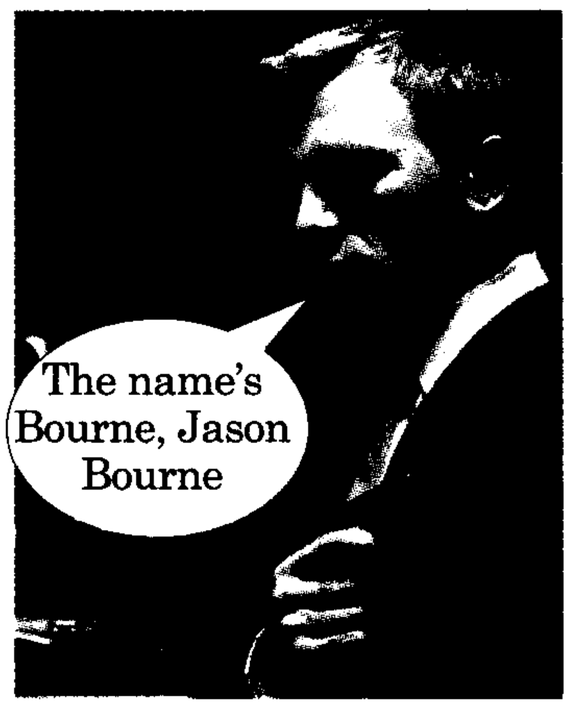
A Taxi Driver writes

EVERY week a well-known taxi-driver is invited to go on a tour of America by the BBC.

This week, **Stephen Fry**, Cab No. 0112358 (the opening digits of the Fibonacci Sequence, as it happens).

When one contemplates the vastness of the geophysical landscape, from the deserts of New Dworkin to the moist tufty swamps of deepest Obama, one's senses (nine, not five as is commonly supposed) are overwhelmed by mystery, wonder and awe at the sheer size, scale, silliness, solitude, serendipity, zippedydoodahzippedyday, flagwaving trumpet-blowing oompahpah Americanness of the whole ridiculous, wondrous scrumptiousness of... where am I again? I had that Simon Schama in the back of my cab. And Griff Rhys Jones. Bless!

NEW, TOUGH, DARK, GRITTY BOND

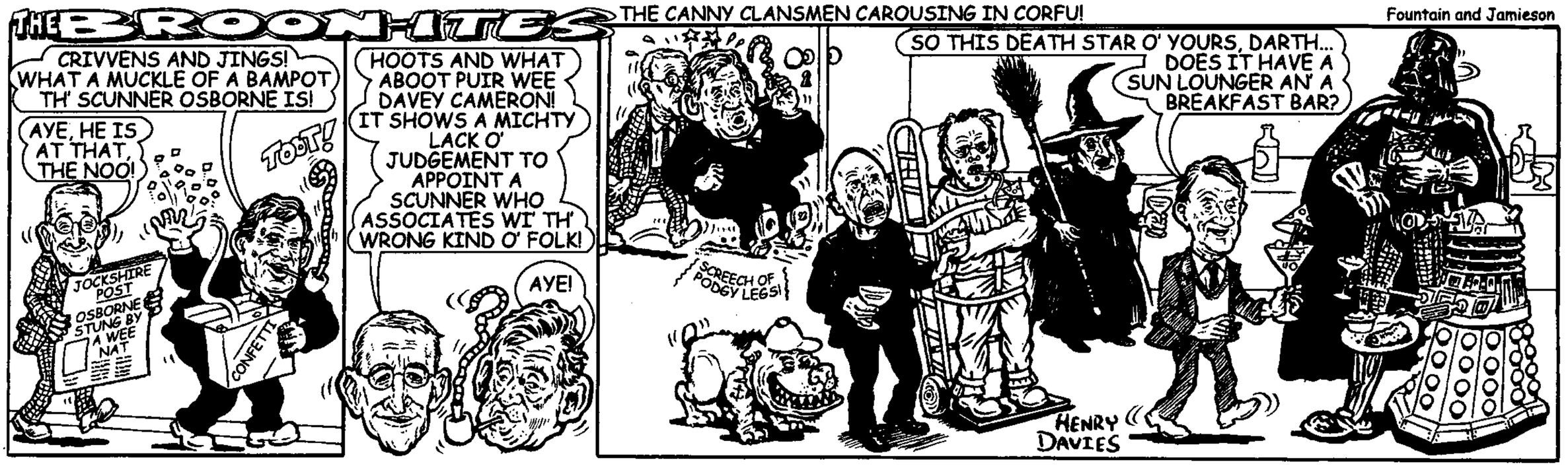


News In Brief

REPOSSESSION SHOCK LATEST

THE BANKS have described comments by Housing Minister Yvette Cooper that they should help out indebted homeowners as dangerously naive.

Said a spokesman: "Banking has never operated on a model that people who get themselves into a financial mess through gross mismanagement should then expect to be bailed out at the last minute by a third party." He continued, "Oh, yes it has. Silly me..."


THE BROON-ITES
CRIVVENS AND JINGS! WHAT A MUCKLE OF A BAMPOT TH' SCUNNER OSBORNE IS!
AYE, HE IS AT THAT, THE NOO!
TOOT!
JOCKSHIRE POST
OSBORNE STUNG BY A WEE NAT
CONFETTI
HOOTS AND WHAT ABOOT PUIR WEE DAVEY CAMERON! IT SHOWS A MICHTY LACK O' JUDGEMENT TO APPOINT A SCUNNER WHO ASSOCIATES WI' TH' WRONG KIND O' FOLK!
AYE!
THE CANNY CLANSMEN CAROUSING IN CORFU!
Fountain and Jamieson
SCREECH OF PODGY LEGS!
SO THIS DEATH STAR O' YOURS, DARTH... DOES IT HAVE A SUN LOUNGER AN' A BREAKFAST BAR?
HENRY DAVIES

RECESSION 2008

How The Global Meltdown Is Affecting *You*

Mr Simon Montague, 49, solicitor. "I haven't really noticed it yet in Bishop's Stortford but we'll have to make economies and I'm sure we'll all pull through."

Mrs Pearl Harbor, 57, Horse Whisperer. "It hasn't really hit us yet here in Purfleet but I'm sure we can rely on good old British spirit to see us through."

Mr Hinduja Patel, 55, Proprietor of Patel Oriental Confectionary Emporium, Southwold. "To tell you the truth, business is terrific at the moment. People always want sweeties when times are hard."

Ms Vicki Onanugu, 23, Parking Enforcement Officer, Norwich. "I can't say I've seen much of a problem here but I've done 200 tickets this morning which, in terms of commission, puts me well in front for the week."

Mr Darren Ormandy, 37, Dental Technician, Bridgewater. "Funnily enough I have seen no signs of the financial system going belly-up. Teeth are teeth, let's face it and people need them no matter what is happening on the stock exchange."

(I told you to get some people who were finding it tough. You're fired. Ed.)

Sid Hack, 31, Picture Probe Co-ordinator, Daily Mail. "You think it won't happen to you but then suddenly out of the blue you are handed a plastic bag and told to clear your desk."

JOBLESS 'SLASHED' CLAIMS GOVERNMENT

by Our Economics Staff **Phil Jobcentre**

CONTRARY to the expected sharp rise in the numbers of the unemployed, the Government has provided new figures revealing that the jobless total has actually fallen in the last month.

Said spokesman Lord Mandelson of Malfoy and Hogwarts, "The number of people due to be out of work has dipped by an astonishing one."

"Two weeks ago," continued Lord Voldemort, "it was assumed that Gordon Brown would be out of a job. But then to everyone's amazement he managed to cling on to his position."

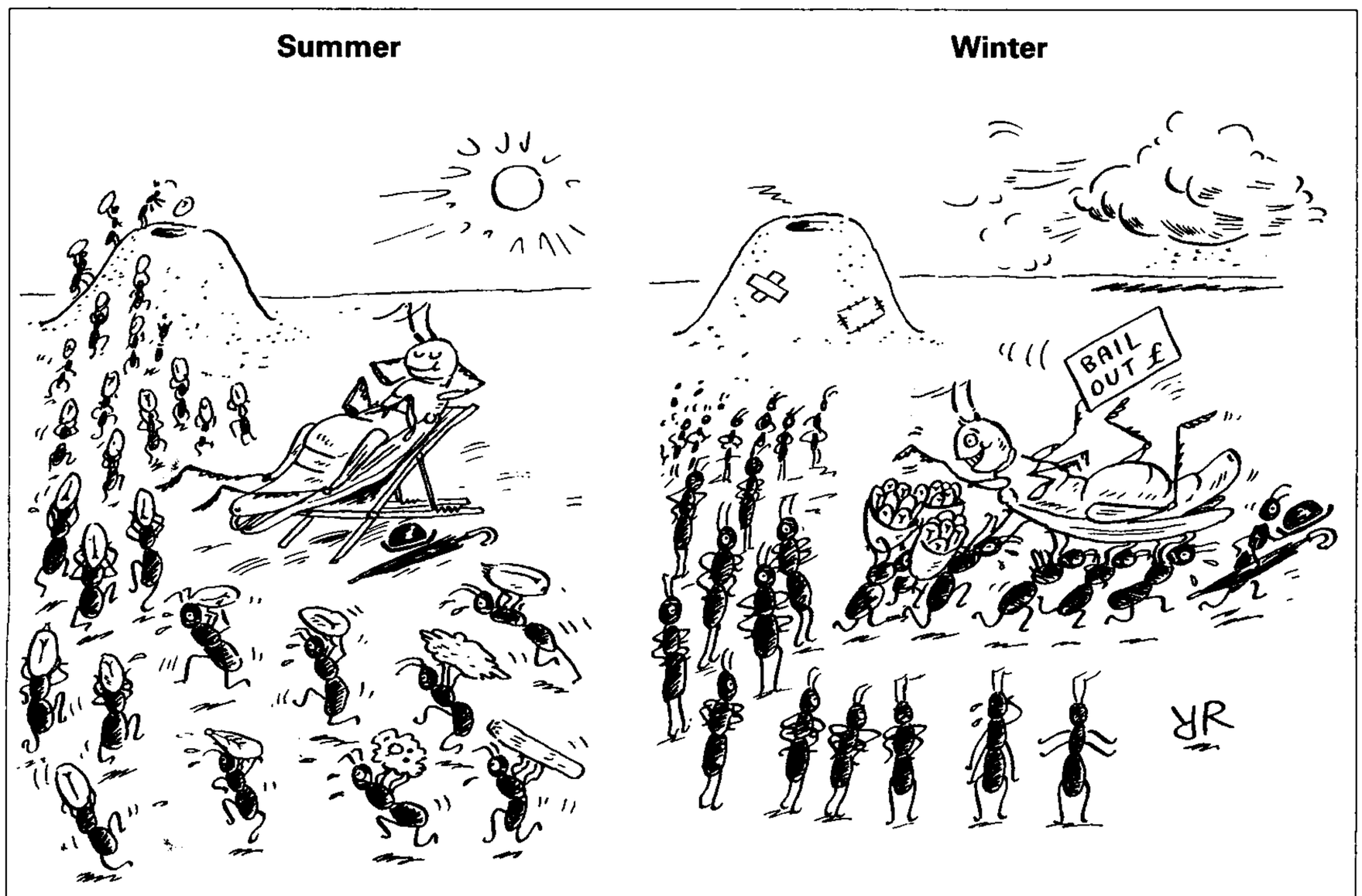
Lord Mandelspin concluded, "This is encouraging evidence that unemployment is now falling and that I am not to be trusted."

That Alistair Darling Explanation For The Economic Crisis In Full

- RECKLESS overspending by consumers using borrowed money they could never afford to pay back

That Alistair Darling Solution For The Economic Crisis In Full

- RECKLESS overspending by Government using borrowed money they could never afford to pay back



The Ant and the Grasshopper Revisited

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2008

HOUSE PRICES COLLAPSE

Is Mandelson to blame?

By Our Daily Mail Staff
Paul Dacre

WITH house prices heading for a record 50% drop the Mail asks: Is the recently enobled Secretary for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, Lord Mandelson, responsible?

YES

Consider the facts. The minute this slimy reptilian crept from under his stone in Brussels to reassume his place at the British Cabinet table hundreds of estate agents immediately went bankrupt and *(cont. p. 49.)*

ON OTHER PAGES

Save Our Small Businesses Run By Fruity Young Women

The Daily Mail today starts a major campaign in support of small businesses run by fruity young businesswomen whose photos we can plaster all over page one.

Sure we understand that businesses owned by balding blokes in their 50's are struggling too in these difficult economic times.

But pictures of them won't sell too many newspapers will they?

That's why we're not demanding a fair deal for these fruity businesses – no, we're demanding a "Phwooar deal" for them!!

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

DISASTER AS OIL PRICES RISE/DROP

THERE were fresh fears expressed today for the health of the global economy after a sharp fall/rise in oil prices overnight.

The fact that oil prices are falling at an unprecedented rate/rising at an unprecedented rate means it is almost certain that the world will be plunged into a second great depression.

Oil analysts say that unless Opec steps in with decisive action that means oil prices stop falling/rising and start rising/falling the world is doomed.

HARRODS BOSS IN UNDER-AGE SEX SHOCKER

by Our Underagesexshocker Correspondent **Jim Slip**

MOHAMED FAYED, the Port-Said-born owner of the prestigious Knightsbridge department store, yesterday hit back at allegations that he had assaulted a 15-year-old visitor to his emporium.

"They have got the wrong man," he insisted. "It was the Duke of Edinburgh. I'm fuggin' telling you. He came into the Food Hall in a white Fiat Uno and *(Cont. p. 94)*

ON OTHER PAGES
■ **Did he do it? *You* decide.**

What You Missed

The Today Programme

Radio 4

John Humphrys *(for it is he)*: And now, the government's plan to introduce compulsory sex lessons for the under-fives. In our Nuneaton studio we have the educational adviser to the Department for Children, Innovation and Lifelong Skills, Kevin Dimwit. Mr Dimwit, is this really what we want? Sex education in nursery schools?

Dimwit: Well you know we are rolling out a new classroom programme…

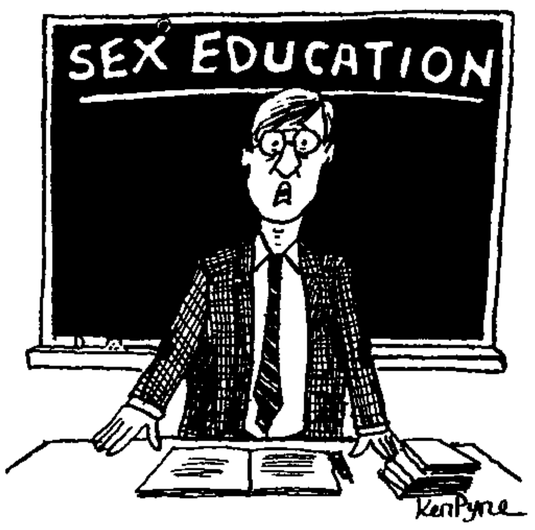
Humphrys: So, will the lessons contain words like "penis" and "condom"? Is that the sort of thing we want toddlers to hear and repeat to their parents when they get home?

Dimwit: Well, er, you know John, what we are looking at is an innovative attempt to introduce…

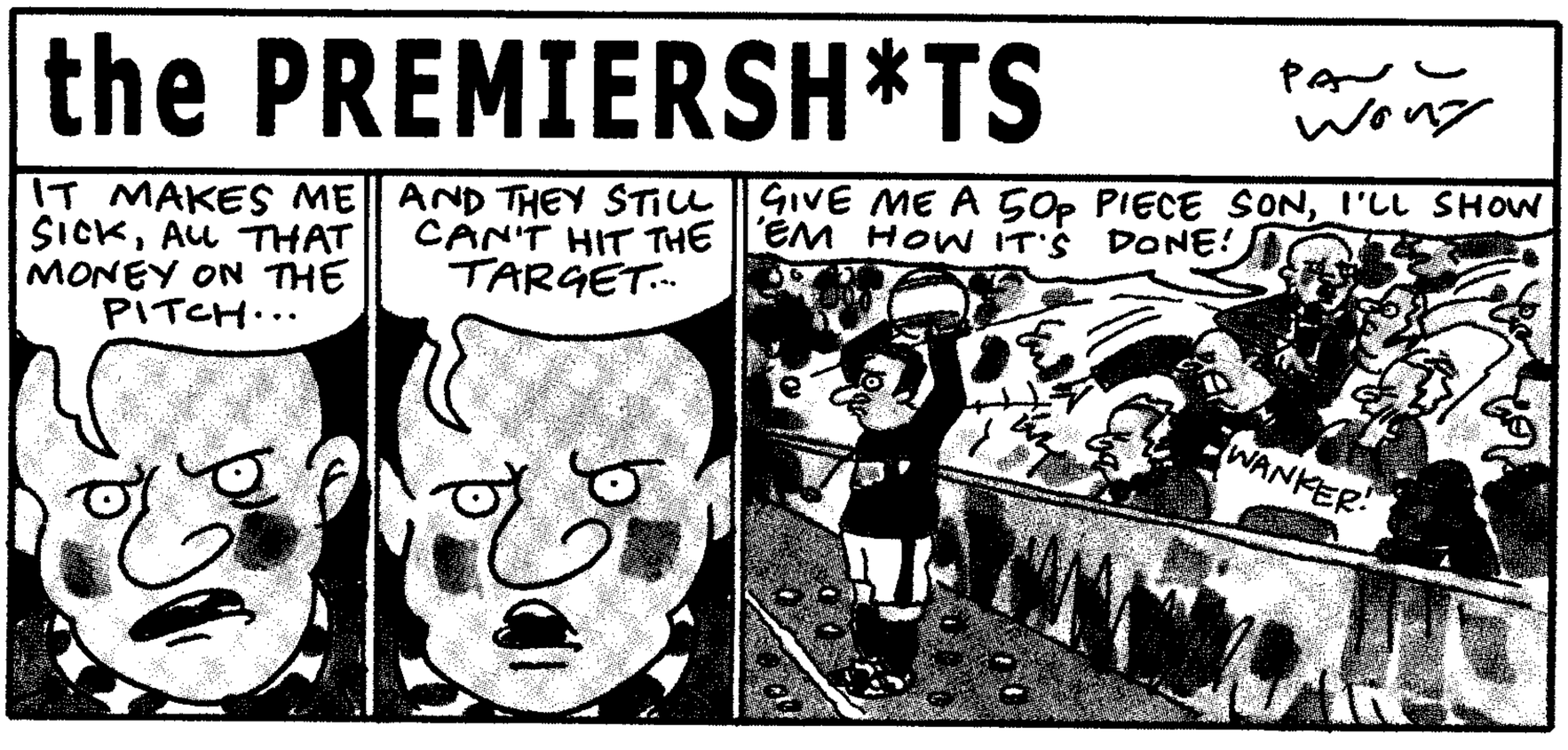
Humphrys: Words like "vagina" and "clitoris" and "anal penetration"? Is that what we're going to hear? Let's be frank about this, I mean the next thing we know people will be saying these things on the radio at 8.15 in the morning during the school run in order to spice up their dreary programmes. Isn't that what's going to happen? Condom? Arse? Fellatio?

Posh woman: And now, thought for the day with the editor of Playboy magazine, the Reverend Simon Heffner.

Heffner: You know, in a very real sense we all need sex education throughout our lives and who amongst us can honestly put his hand on his penis and say *(cont. p. 94)*



"The birds have all got flu and the bees are all dead"


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOD
IT MAKES ME SICK, ALL THAT MONEY ON THE PITCH...
AND THEY STILL CAN'T HIT THE TARGET...
GIVE ME A 50p PIECE SON, I'LL SHOW 'EM HOW IT'S DONE!
WANKER!

Woman Famous For Getting Out Of Her Head Appears On TV Out Of Her Head Shock

A CELEBRITY appeared on live TV yesterday seemingly under the influence of either drugs or alcohol – hundreds of concerned viewers are said to have bombarded the show's switchboard to enquire whether the footage was available on YouTube.

DIARY

PAUL THEROUX: TO MY FRIDGE AND BACK

I never meant to go back to it. It was on the other side of the kitchen, it had nothing in it that I really wanted, and its desolate hum bugged the hell out of me.

So why did I return to that fridge? What on earth did I hope to find in it? Why did I get out of my seat and, at great trouble to myself, make the journey across the cold, inconsequential kitchen to that chillingly white citadel of unwanted, half-eaten, food? On other trips, to other places, I had visited brothels in order to meet local prostitutes for the purpose of interview. But surely I could not expect to find a prostitute in my own fridge? No, I kept reminding myself: this is not what fridges are for.

I had made the same journey, there and back, that very morning. At the time, I wrote: "I really enjoyed venturing across the kitchen to the fridge just now. It gave me some healthy exercise, it let me see my surroundings through my writer's eyes, and the cold chipolata I got out of it was delicious. For all the fuss that's made of him, it's a journey that Vidia Naipaul would never have attempted in a million years, the guy's so lazy and out of shape. I believe my fridge is just the right size: all the food I need fits in it, and yet it's so compact."

But that was then; this is now. What I hadn't bothered to mention when I wrote that passage this morning was that just as I was halfway to the fridge the telephone had rung, so I was forced to retrace my steps – at least two or even three of them – to answer it. And it was a wrong number. Someone unknown to me – a madman hellbent on destroying my equilibrium – had interrupted my journey to the fridge with a phone-call I didn't need. Whoever it was had no regard for my time as a writer. It struck me then like a thunderflash that this was the way human beings were in the 21st century: thoughtless, selfish and incompetent, unable to do the simplest thing, like dialling a number, without fucking it up. When I put the receiver back, I sat down again, trembling with rage, and decided, in my despair, to abandon my journey to the fridge. So, contrary to what I had written then, I never in fact made it to the fridge, never opened the door, never consumed the cold chipolata. Instead, I had remained in my seat, seething with fury. My account of the voyage was partial in its truthfulness, but, as Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad taught us, there are greater truths, unbound by accuracy, to which only the most exacting writer is ever party.

But all the time I sat there I remained desperately homesick for the fridge. For a while, I sat reading the complete works of Shakespeare. Withdrawn, moody, ill-at-ease in a crowd, he reminded me of myself. We both understood human beings. Shakespeare is without doubt a much, much better writer than V.S. Naipaul, who no-one reads anymore. What a horse's arse that guy really is. He is just so arrogant. Why did they give him, of all people, the Nobel Prize for Literature? Of course, they offered it to me first, but I said no, that prize is just for losers.

Yet the fridge kept beckoning me, like a prostitute in tight leather hotpants in a backstreet of Bangkok. Why? What exactly did I hope to find when I pulled open that door?

Over the years, I have been all around the world. At the time, I considered some of those trips quite interesting. But on reflection I realise they were not. India, China, the Antarctic, Brazil: they're all the same. And, looking through my notebooks, I now realise that all the conversations I've ever had along the way with strangers have been much of a muchness, too:

- *To a fellow passenger on the Trans-Siberian Express (1979):* Excuse me, would you mind turning that music down a bit? I can't hear myself think. Thank you.
- *To a fellow passenger on the London – Plymouth Express (1981):* Excuse me, but I couldn't help wondering whether you're a prostitute? What do you mean, how dare I? I'm a writer, dammit! I was only after some local colour. Jeez, some people!
- *To a fellow passenger on the Mumbai-Bangalore steam train (1997):* Excuse me, you're sitting on my hat. Well, you're almost sitting on it. Look, I don't want an argument. I said I don't want an argument.
- *To a fellow passenger on the Peruvian Trans-continental Express (2003):* Excuse me, the sign says no smoking. Well, then.
- *To a fellow passenger on the Tokyo-Nagasaki Express (1992):* Excuse me, I'm a travel writer, are you a prostitute by any chance? Hey, no need to get nasty, madam, I was just asking. I'm a famous writer.
- *To a fellow passenger on the San Francisco – Chicago Overlander Amtrak Express (1983):* Excuse me, could I ask you why you're bothering to read that? It's crap. The guy hasn't written a decent book in thirty years. Naipaul? He's old and sour and unattractive. Look, I'll pay you to throw it away. How much do you want? I said, how much? Okay, so think of a figure, I'll double it.

One thing was for sure: even though it was a bit of a walk from my kitchen table, the fridge was bound to be more interesting than China, which is just a tip, or either of the Americas, which are an ugly sprawl, or Australia, which is even worse. And is there a halfway-decent restaurant in the whole of Africa? I don't think so.

So I set out on my return visit to that fridge in a spirit of hope. But it was a hope that was soon to be dashed. Arriving at the fridge, I felt a wave of despair that straddled me and hit me again and again like an aggrieved prostitute. What if Naipaul had got there first and emptied it, the thieving bastard? I would never forgive him.

I braced myself and pulled open the door. Inside was a half-empty bottle of milk, an old piece of chicken-skin, a stale slab of cheese with a bite taken out of it. And that cold chipolata.

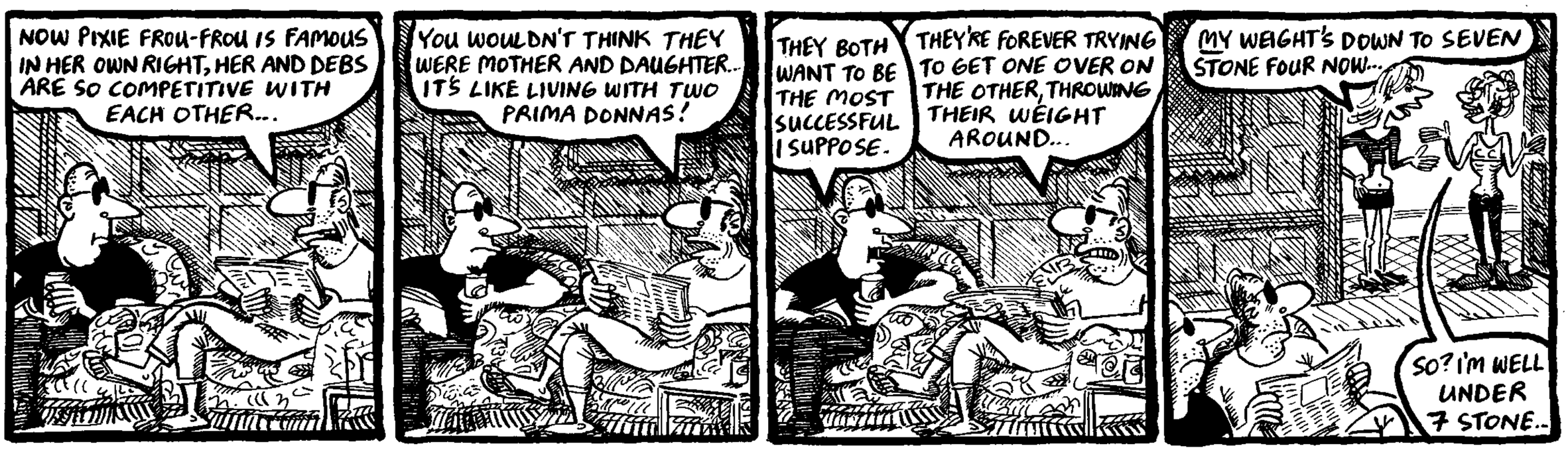
This was my fridge. This was my home. This was my country. This was the world. And – what makes it worse – it's the only one we have.

Still, I could probably get a book out of it, something for the general reader to enjoy, and doubtless a welcome break from the turgid meanderings of a writer like Naipaul. So I picked up my pen, like a man might pick up a willing whore, and with it I wrote the first sentence: I never meant to go back to it.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


NOW PIXIE FROU-FROU IS FAMOUS IN HER OWN RIGHT, HER AND DEBS ARE SO COMPETITIVE WITH EACH OTHER...
YOU WOULDN'T THINK THEY WERE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER... IT'S LIKE LIVING WITH TWO PRIMA DONNAS!
THEY BOTH WANT TO BE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL I SUPPOSE.
THEY'RE FOREVER TRYING TO GET ONE OVER ON THE OTHER, THROWING THEIR WEIGHT AROUND...
MY WEIGHT'S DOWN TO SEVEN STONE FOUR NOW...
SO? I'M WELL UNDER 7 STONE..

Literary Review

Sold short

The First Person and other stories

Ali Smith

(Hamish Hamilton £16.99)

QUESTION: How do you bulk out a wafer-thin collection of short stories – *The First Person* can't be more than 35,000 words long – to something approaching standard book length?

One trick is to use a very large typeface. Another is to print the title of each story on a separate page and cultivate as much white space as possible in the pages that surround it. Anyway, by a Herculean effort of design, Messrs Hamish Hamilton have somehow managed to extend the book to 207 pages – which, given that at least 30 of them are text-free, works out at 10p a page. That's a gargantuan rip-off.

As for the stories, well, Ms Ali Smith here is one of the hippest performers on the modern literary block right now and the critics just love her ("She's a genius, genuinely modern in the heroic, glorious sense" – Alain de Botton). Together with such contemporaries as David Mitchell and her namesake Zadie, she even merits her own special critical category. According to Professor Richard Bradford in his recent survey *The Novel Now*, she is something called a "domesticated postmodernist". This apparently means a writer who doesn't quite let his or her weakness for highbrow trickery get in the way of a desire to sell large numbers of copies.

The operative critical adjective here, inevitably, is "quirky". Ms S specialises in madcap narrative rambles, where the characters tend to whirl from one scene to another by means of a kind of free association. The effect is like watching a frog hop from one lily pad to another and can be quite exhilarating until you realise you can't remember what happened three pads earlier.

Thus *The Child* has a Waitrose habituée finding a curly-haired little boy in her shopping trolley and driving the infant around the Scottish countryside while he favours her with some bracing right-wing remarks and politically incorrect humour. *Present* finds a woman (most of Smith's stories are female monologues) who, oppressed by a pub bore who wants to tell her what "a really happy Christmas is", ends up devising her own version.

Tolerable in small doses, the approach soon starts to parody itself and by the advent of *The Third Person* simply skips from one unheralded situation to the next, with the reader, desperate for elements such as pace and characterisation, trailing miserably in the rear.

As you might expect, the best stories in *The First Person* are the ones in which something actually happens. *I Know Things You Don't Know* takes in a mysterious, bedridden boy whose mother is torn between a pair of alternative therapists, while *The History of History* features a teenage girl whose mother is in the throes of cracking up.

What becomes most irritating is Smith's inability to stop theorising about the short story form even as she spins her variations on it. *True Short Story*, which opens the book, has the café-bound narrator – Smith herself, you infer – eavesdropping on a couple of men who are discussing the short story's superiority to the novel. These opinions are relayed to Smith's hospitalised friend. The piece concludes with a dozen or so explanations of what makes a short story work: "Ernest Hemingway says that short stories are made by their own change and movement… Walter Benjamin says that short stories are stronger than the real, lived moment…"

Some critics would say that a good short story is one that isn't quite so obviously contrived and doesn't draw quite so much attention to its own facility, but there you are.

Books & Bookmen

■ THE MOST striking aspect of Alan Bennett's recent donation of his papers to the Bodleian, the library of his alma mater, was that he asked for no payment.

"I felt in a way it's a recompense for the education I was given," he explained. "I went to a state school in Leeds. I went to Oxford on a scholarship. I benefited at every stage from the nanny state, as it was disparagingly called. I'm grateful to be nannied."

This may seem a typical mixture of modesty and cuddly quaintness, the author identifying himself with a bygone age of childish trust in a benevolent welfare state. But, as so often with Bennett, a latent spikiness can be found if you look for it: a disdain for a later, greedier era, of celebrity authors – or their families – trousering fortunes. At the end of last year the British Library acquired the papers of Harold Pinter (another playwright born in the 1930s) for £1.1m, and earlier this month it splashed out £500,000 for the remaining archive of Ted Hughes (another Yorkshireman born in the 1930s).

Bennett's giveaway offers a contrast with these sales, and, more sharply, with the earlier decisions of Tom Stoppard and David Hare to reap the benefits of letting their archives leave Britain, for the University of Texas at Austin – making him the only leading British dramatist both to ensure his papers remain in this country and to hand them over for nothing.

■ ANDREW MOTION, in Saturday's *Guardian*, enthused that a "beautifully produced" new biography of Chagall by Jackie Wullschlager showed the *FT* art critic had "a sharp sense of what is gorgeously original in the paintings" and was written in prose "that registers intense feeling yet is coolly well organised".

Undeclared in this paean was the personal link. Wullschlager reviewed for Motion's wife Jan Dalley – they are no longer together but are still friendly – when Dalley was the *FT*'s literary editor, and continues to write for her in her current post as arts editor. In a piquant instance of the book world's cosiness, Dalley hosted the biography's launch party last week at the former marital abode.

■ DAVID LOYN, the Beeb's developing world correspondent, is both (a) a BBC News colleague of John Sweeney, and (b) a fellow Random House author. Might these obvious bars to impartiality lead the irascible Sweeney (whose on-air rant at a Scientologist made him a global YouTube star) to say a regretful no to approaches to review *Butcher and Bolt*, Loyn's book on foreign invaders of Afghanistan? Of course not!

Two pages of the latest *New Statesman* are taken up by Sweeney's tribute to "a brilliant history book", which "should be a must-read for every politician who sends our squaddies into Afghanistan". More surprising is finding a Sweeney article with only two "I"s and one "me" in it.

■ AMAZON'S announcement of a new print-on-demand service for the UK has small presses and self-publishing houses and the on-demand printers they use quaking.

In the US, Amazon is already facing an antitrust lawsuit after insisting in March that it would only sell print-on-demand (pod) books that were printed through its own pod printer, Booksurge. If publishers wanted to carry on using other printers, they must either supply at least five printed copies of each book to Amazon's warehouse – and pay $29.95 for the privilege – or face having their "buy buttons" turned off.

Amazon says its UK pod service is unrelated to the American system and that it will allow books from mainstream publishers to be published in other formats, such as large print. But publishers have good reason to be nervous – Amazon.co.uk has been known to remove the buy button from books before if publishers won't do as they're told, as it did with Hachette Livre earlier this year.

PAT KAVANAGH, who has died aged 68, was a brilliant and highly effective literary agent, whose clients included Robert Harris, Ruth Rendell, William Trevor, Laurie Lee, Clive James, Andrew Motion, Joanna Trollope, Posy Simmonds, Redmond O'Hanlon, Michael Dibdin, Dirk Bogarde and her husband, Julian Barnes.

The Daily Telegraph

■ THE endorsement of Richard and Judy has long been the magic touch that sends a book's sales into the stratosphere. Just witness the recipient of their "Best Read of the Year" award this year, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which has sold well over a million copies.

Sadly for Simon & Schuster, which forked out "a high six-figure sum" for Richard Madeley's family memoir, he doesn't seem to have the same effect on his own work. While the rest of the pre-Christmas crop of celebrity biographies whirl into the bestseller lists, in its first three weeks on sale Madeley's *Fathers and Sons* shifted a mere 2,790 copies.

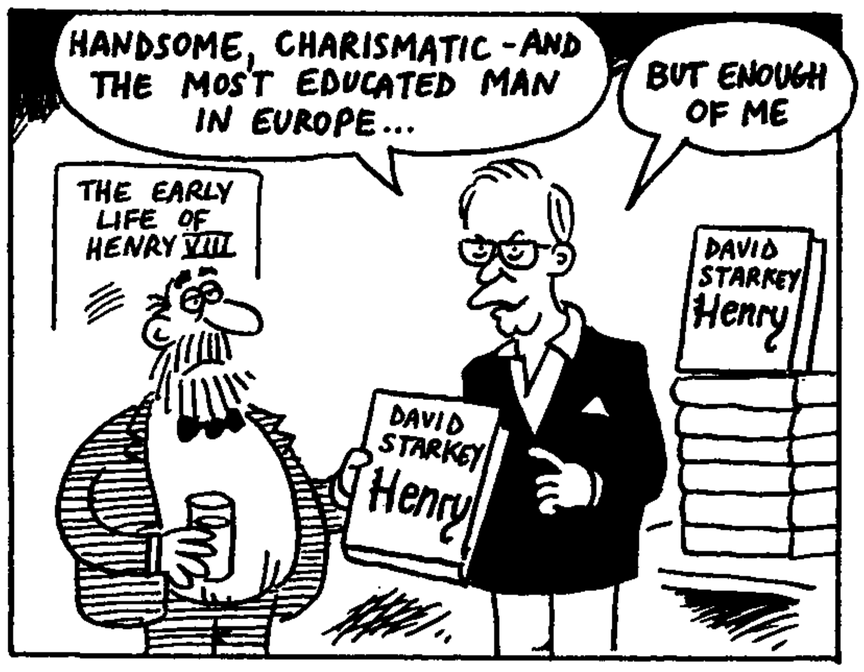
'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ GOOD news from London's East End, where the rich local history collection is no longer to be kicked out of its home in the magnificent old Vestry Hall on Bancroft Road.

The archive, including documents, photographs and artefacts, was to have been broken up between depositories and various London museums (*Eye* 1213). But following a massive local outcry, led by the *East London Advertiser* and backed by academics, writers and politicians, Tower Hamlets council has u-turned on its plans to sell the building to Queen Mary College for £1.2m. The council is now investigating sources of external funding to spruce up the building.

Less cheery news for Tower Hamlets' library users is the size of the repair bill for the borough's "Ideas Stores". This has now reached £700,000 – with £330,000 alone racked up on architect David Adjaye's Whitechapel "store" since it opened in late 2005. Repairs are so ludicrously expensive, because every broken window pane or bathroom fitting means replacing a non-standard, architect-designed item. Terrific value for money!


HANDSOME, CHARISMATIC - AND THE MOST EDUCATED MAN IN EUROPE...
BUT ENOUGH OF ME
THE EARLY LIFE OF HENRY VIII
DAVID STARKEY Henry
DAVID STARKEY Henry

Pseuds Corner

Never mind the enduring brilliance of Madonna's self-created "brand" or the many reinventions of her stage persona, fabulous though they are. The real appeal is in the twists her life has taken, and the way they always seem to echo the experiences of "ordinary" women... The soon-to-be-former Mrs Ritchie remains the zeitgeist queen, a one-woman barometer of where women are at. To mix metaphors, it's as if she's the digital image and we're the pixels.

INDIA KNIGHT, *Sunday Times*

Were you traumatised when you were a sperm?

Article by JULIET YELVERTON of the Healing Waters Sanctuary, *South West Connection*

I didn't choose opera. Opera chose me. I think opera made the right choice.

DAVID McVICAR, Desert Island Discs

Here Liam's reflective paean to perseverance oscillates soberly between a single titular mantra and bursts of keening melodica from Noel until both dissipate...[continues]

PETE PAPHIDES on the new Oasis album, *The Times*

With *Liver*, cunt appears within the first six lines...Unfortunately they are necessary cunts. It's not that I am addicted to shocking my readers. When cunt is the right word, the mot juste, what can I do? I have to use it. I am a prisoner of cunt. I am not particularly enamoured of the word myself, and if I was a punter giving my work a try for the first time I might see cunt in the opening page and think, Mmm, not for me. But I am an artist and I have a job to do. I must never censor myself.

WILL SELF, *Q Magazine*

Jamie Oliver is only secondarily a chef. He is primarily a shaman of social hope.

THEO HOBSON, *Spectator*

MY YOUTH DIED IN FRANCE COLLECTION THREE, 2008, Part Two

We draw inspiration for our collection by exploring people and their stories rather than reprocessing looks and styles. For our third collection we considered the lost generation that was wiped out during the mass grave-filling operations that dogged the First World War, and spent time in France researching the everyday wear of people who both worked and lived around these horrendous scenes. All cottons for this collection are woven in Japan and homage is paid to our textile haven for introducing reproduction WWI era Japanese corded cloth.

Garbstore owner IAN PALEY, Garbstore website

CONTRIBUTORS: Andy Thacker, M. Robins, Don Salter, Nick Emmett, Paul Townsend, Graham Shearer, George Theohari.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PRISONS

Cell on earth

DRUG GANGS, violence, fear, vermin infestation; some inmates locked two to a cell for up to 22 hours a day, eating and sleeping "at arm's length from an unscreened toilet": welcome to Brixton jail, as described by Anne Owers, chief inspector of prisons.

As the prison population spirals upwards – now more than 83,500, a quarter up on the number inherited from the Tories – Ms Owers warns that Brixton "exemplifies all the problems of our overcrowded prison system".

According to Frances Crook, of the Howard League prison reform charity, Brixton is typical of many Victorian inner city jails where governors are forced to cope with budget cuts while handling more and more prisoners, many of whom are drug addicts, alcoholics or mentally ill.

With prison governors and staff not given the resources to provide meaningful treatment, education, employment or sufficient time out of cells, the result is a toxic mix. When inspectors went round Brixton more than half the prisoners told them they felt unsafe. Nevertheless, procedures to identify and deal with violence and gang-related activity, and to support vulnerable prisoners, were "underdeveloped". Only 30 percent of the jail's 727 inmates has access to education facilities. "For the rest there was very little."

While staff cope with Dickensian squalor at the sharp end, the boss classes at the National Offender Management Service are of course settling into plush, newly refurbished offices at the home office. With the news that NOMS' 10 regional directors will earn up to £160,000 (more than lowly cabinet ministers even) there is little sign that director-general Phil Wheatley is reining in his bureaucratic empire which continues to waste money on consultants, a useless IT system and endless re-organisations (*Eyes passim*).

Independence daze

THE inquiry into the treatment of a teenage girl, "SP", who repeatedly injured herself and tried to take her own life while in prison has a new chairman. But is the man chosen – himself a former governor of a young offenders institution, really independent enough to conduct such a sensitive investigation?

"SP" is a severely mentally ill young woman. Aged 17 in 2003, she was sentenced to five years for assault and robbery and sent to New Hall YOI. There, SP harmed herself so severely she had to be taken to hospital for blood transfusions. She also tried to kill herself. The prison responded by placing her in segregation, often leaving her to spend 22 hours a day alone in her cell.

Finally, in 2005, prison reform charity the Howard League secured an injunction stopping SP from being taken back to prison from hospital. Instead she was taken to Rampton Secure Hospital where she could get more appropriate psychiatric care. The charity called for an inquiry into SP's case, which was granted by the then home secretary, Charles Clarke.

Prisons and probation ombudsman Stephen Shaw was appointed to chair this inquiry, but it was put on hold this summer after Shaw quit citing "an unwarranted and unacceptable attempt to fetter [his] independence" by the Prison Service. He was furious that the service wanted to restrict his access to documents and staff. He also thought that "near death" hearings should be conducted by a coroner, judge or independent lawyer.

Instead, the SP case now has retired Prison Service manager Bryan Payling at the helm. Payling was governor of Glen Parva YOI before becoming a Prison Service area manager in the West Midlands. He came out of retirement recently to head the service's *internal* investigation into corruption and drug smuggling at Pentonville – which exonerated 12 prison officers of wrongdoing, although it did criticise the governor's response to the allegations.

POLICE 5

Booze crews

THE hard-drinking, unreconstructed *Life on Mars* copper is alive and well and still busy abusing his liver, it seems.

The latest employment tribunal alleging discrimination and victimisation brought by Det Sgt Gurpal Virdi (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) against the Metropolitan Police was given details of "Operation Trafalgar". This operation was organised by the specialist crime directorate (SCD) to which Virdi was assigned. Outlined in some detail on the office white board, it was not about crime-busting at all but, er, an all-day police drinking exercise in October 2005, travelling down the Thames and taking in a pub or several and visiting the Greenwich Maritime museum. The tribunal was told the trip was to boost staff morale.

Virdi declined to attend the event, not solely because he is a non-drinker but also because he was "not paid by the taxpayer to drink while on duty".

Sgt Virdi is, as *Eye* readers know, the officer who was originally awarded a total of £240,000 by an employment tribunal that found he had been unlawfully sacked after being fitted up by his colleagues for sending race hate mail to other ethnic minority officers – as well as to himself. Earlier this year he was awarded a further £70,400 after a second tribunal found that he had been victimised during the inspector promotion process because he had had the audacity to take out the previous discrimination action. This is now subject to an appeal.

As well as seeing the white board, this third tribunal, in which Virdi alleges he is still being ostracised and victimised, was also shown a photograph of him and a black policewoman pictured with former London mayor Ken Livingstone. Someone had outlined the woman in felt tip and scrawled: "Missing since 2003 – has this man anything to do with it?" (meaning Livingstone). As the female officer was on long-term sick leave and was also alleging discrimination and victimisation by her colleagues, Virdi found this offensive and took it down.

Amazingly – given the wrongful arrest and previous made-up allegations about race hate mail against the detective sergeant – under cross-examination Virdi was accused by Clive Sheldon, counsel for the Metropolitan Police, of defacing the picture himself! Knacker, it seems, is as plodding as ever.

Originally Jacqueline Durman, the office manager for the SCD, had said in a statement that she had not seen the picture that Virdi had taken down and that it was not the one that had originally appeared on the board. Now, however, after Virdi's lawyers put it to Chief Inspector James Cooke during cross-examination that his handwriting matched that on the picture (something Cooke emphatically denied), Ms Durman has changed her mind. In a further statement, she now recalls having seen the marked photograph and remembers that it was defaced by Myles O'Reilly, Virdi's previous line manager, who has since retired.

What will the tribunal make of it all? Will Plod never learn? The Virdi saga continues.

ACTIS

Hotel chain reaction

POORER countries haven't been the first to be hit by the global credit crunch, but they'll soon feel the consequences through reduced aid and a squeeze on investment.

Time for funds committed to poverty relief to show some commitment? Not if the fund is managed by Actis, the private equity fund management arm sold off for peanuts by publicly-owned CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, to its bosses in 2004 and still the steward of most of CDC's money.

A fortnight ago Actis announced that it was leading a $65m investment in a Chinese hotel chain, 7 Days Inn, because "the strong value-for-money proposition of budget hotels is increasingly appealing to domestic business travellers and newly affluent Chinese who travel for leisure". The firm, boasts Actis, "has been the fastest growing company in China's chain hotel industry for three consecutive years".

Actis and CDC officially "aim to invest where others are generally unwilling to do so". But its rules require it simply to target "poorer" countries as determined by average per capita income even if the investments do much more for the rich in those societies than the poor. So successful hotel chains that have no trouble attracting private money? They get the cash instead.

Actis's China boss Lim Meng Ann (pictured) summed it up: "This investment fits into Actis's strategy of investing in China's domestic consumption sectors, particularly those which are defensive in times like this." In other words when the economic going gets tough, it's time to walk away from the troublesome poor.

SEARCH & RESCUE

Who's for the chopper?

PRINCE WILLIAM is likely to find that life as a helicopter pilot for the RAF's search and rescue service will present rather tougher challenges than landing in his girlfriend's gigantic garden.

With storm clouds gathering over the £5bn, 20-year private finance initiative (PFI) the government is introducing to supply helicopters for Britain's coastguards and search-and-rescue service, Wills and his future colleagues will have to make do with machines not equipped for the job.

Following the withdrawal from the bidding process of UK Air Rescue, the only UK contender, there are now just two bidders, both North American – and one of them is currently supplying helicopters that cannot fly at night and have been plagued with problems on rescue missions.

Until now the coastguard service and RAF both flew variations of the Sea King helicopter, a large, well-loved but ageing machine that needed replacement. The government bundled the separate RAF and Maritime & Coastguard Agency services into one PFI, which starts in 2012. But the coastguard service has had to cover the gap between 2007 and 2012, so it signed an interim agreement with the Canadian Helicopter Corporation (CHC). For about £100m, CHC supplies aircraft, including some new models like the AgustaWestland AW139 (pictured), which were sent to coastguard stations on the Solent and at Portland.

Peter Cardy, chief executive of the Maritime & Coast Guard Agency, was excited. He said: "These new aircraft will be able to fly more quickly and will be able to fly farther to people in distress at sea than those currently in use. They have been specifically kitted with various items of advanced technical equipment."

In fact, however, they weren't. Coastguard sources have told *Private Eye* of a catalogue of difficulties with the AW139, including the fact that they can't be left out in the rain because the cockpit fills with water; and they can't land on soft earth because their small wheels mean night-vision cameras on the bottom become stuck in the mud. Even more importantly, the MCA has confirmed to the *Eye* that the AW139s cannot fly at night because they have neither adequate searchlights nor "autohover" capability.

CHC, which also has a contract to provide the Irish search and rescue service, flew in an Irish S61 helicopter and crew to give night cover. However, the Irish S61 – a version of the Sea King – is less advanced than the British S61s it replaces and is sometimes unavailable because the Irish crews need rest and changeovers.

Meanwhile, the AW139s fly in the day, but not always happily. Recently a winch on one failed mid-rescue, leaving an injured diver hanging in the air. The coastguards were unable to save his life (though there is no evidence that winch failure caused the diver's death).

Come 2012 and current problems will be magnified, with just the two contenders for the PFI contract: a consortium called Airknight based around Lockheed / Vosper ThornyCroft and a consortium called Soteria based around… CHC. Soteria is named after the Greek god of safety, presumably because they didn't know the name for the Greek god of cock-ups.

ARMS FAIRS

Baby shambles

BABY SHOW organisers Clarion Events may yet regret snapping up the arms fair business abandoned by their rivals.

Publishing and events giant Reed Elsevier finally got shot of the DSEi, ITEC and LAAD arms fairs earlier this year after severe criticism from its own publications, including *The Lancet* (*Eye* 1212), as well as anti-arms campaigners. Now Clarion is dealing with a formidable band of angry mums.

When online community Mumsnet put out a call for volunteers to run its stall at the Baby Show, a member questioned whether they should associate themselves with Clarion, given its new involvement in arms fairs. Hundreds of other parents chipped in to the discussion, even citing the *Eye*'s past coverage of the arms trade. Many agreed that they should keep well away from the fair and Mumsnet decided not to go.

When Mumsnet contacted Clarion about its concerns, show manager Matt Miller replied sniffily that it was inaccurate to call them arms fairs when they are really "trade exhibitions... which serve only the legitimate global defence industry". So that's all right then.

PS: Baby products company Bounty has also decided not to take an exhibition stand to the show, even though it is one of the event's sponsors. And Unicef announced that it will not be accepting donations from Clarion, even though it was due to receive funds raised from ticket sales.

PPS: What kind of man could think that baby shows and bomb fairs sit well together? Step forward David Arculus, boss of Clarion, deregulation adviser to Gordon Brown and now David Cameron, and former boss of regulation-fiddling South West Water!

IN THE SALEROOM

Christie's and a lot of balls

All cricket-lovers know what happened at Swansea on 31 August 1968: Garry Sobers, batting for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan, hit six sixes in an over for the first time in the history of first-class cricket. But who knows what happened to the cricket ball that he kept hoisting over the boundary?

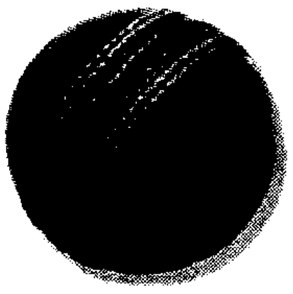
The auctioneers at Christie's seemed to know. Their catalogue for a sale two years ago included what they described as a "red leather Special County cricket ball, manufactured by Duke & Son, Nottingham, signed 'G. Sobers' (seam stained, quarter seam split, general scuff marks); with a certificate of provenance, stating 'that this signed cricket ball was bowled during the over in which I hit six sixes off Malcolm Nash'."

The ball, passed to Christie's by Sobers's agent, Basharat Hassan, belonged to the former secretary of the Notts supporters' association, Josie Miller, who had been keeping it in her make-up drawer for years but now needed some money to cover medical bills. An anonymous bidder bought it for £26,400.

The story might have ended there but for the sportswriter Grahame Lloyd, who has recently published a book called *Six of the Best: Cricket's Most Famous Over*. During his research he interviewed Malcolm Nash, the hapless bowler on the receiving end of Sobers' onslaught. Nash was amazed to learn that the ball sold at Christie's was made by Duke & Son. "It's a fact that the ball we used that day was a Stuart Surridge ball," he told Lloyd, "because Glamorgan never used anything else for home games."

Lloyd then had a strange conversation with Sobers's agent. "Basharat told me Garry wouldn't like it if I talked to Josie Miller," he recalls. "He also said I shouldn't mention the ball."

The cricket ball sold for £26,400 in November 2006 is almost certainly bogus. And Christie's knew its authenticity was dubious: while carrying out due diligence before the sale, they were told by the former Glamorgan all-rounder Peter Walker that it couldn't be the genuine article. They ignored him. "No records of the ball suppliers exist from the match," their catalogue claimed. "However, Duke & Sons were supplying balls to Glamorgan Country Cricket Club during this period." Not true. Tony Cordle, another Glamorgan bowler of the time, confirms that they never used anything but a Surridge ball because the sports shop which supplied them, run by the county scorer Bill Edwards, had a contract with Stuart Surridge.



For his final six of that glorious over, Sobers lofted the ball out of the ground into St Helen's Avenue, where it was retrieved by a schoolboy who gave it back to the club. Glamorgan then presented it to Nottinghamshire as a souvenir. A report on the presentation in the Glamorgan members' newsletter for December 1968 notes that the ball "was made at the firm of Stuart Surridge".

How do Christie's explain that away? "Three separate balls were used in the over," they claim, implying that even if Malcolm Nash ended the over with a Surridge ball he could also have used a Duke & Son ball. Nash himself says this is nonsense. "We used the same ball all the way through the over. If you look at the BBC Wales footage you see it coming back after every six. It wasn't changed." And, as he points out, he should know – "because I was the one who had to let it go each time and then watch it disappear". Forty years on, it's as elusive as ever.

Health Check see overleaf ➤

HEALTH CHECK

NHS PLC

Fund fair?

PERHAPS it's not surprising that healthcare think-tank, the King's Fund, has teamed up with UnitedHealth and Ernst & Young to cash in on the growing health market (*Eye* 1219). Some of its top managers and associates are unrepentant and influential privateers.

Not least Mark Britnell, who is one of the men who holds the NHS funding purse strings – he's commissioning boss at the department of health (DoH) – and also happens to be a senior associate of the King's Fund. In fact Britnell sat on the DoH interview panels ahead of the selection of the King's Fund and Co consortium as one of seven eligible for contracts to boost the board skills of the primary care trusts (PCTs) in spending their combined £75bn-plus on "world-class commissioning".

When the *Eye* asked if this amounted to a possible conflict of interest on Britnell's behalf, the DoH initially issued a statement saying that all involved were required to sign a conflict statement – and in any case the King's Fund did not get past the pre-qualification questionnaire stage before the interview panels. This was very odd given that the *Eye* had previously talked to the King's Fund about its "success". Ah, explained a DoH spokesman when challenged, officials were referring to another application from the King's Fund – not one where it was part of the Ernst & Young consortium. But the department was still "confident that there has been no conflict of interest". So that's all right then.

Britnell of course co-authored the controversial NHS Plan of July 2000 with then health secretary Alan Milburn. Two of the plan's other key architects now sit on the management committee of the King's Fund. They are Tony Blair's former chief health adviser and now UnitedHealth UK boss Simon Stevens, and Dr Penny Dash, roving adviser to McKinsey & Co, independent health care providers, pharmaceutical companies and private equity groups. Old chums from their DoH days, they both became King's Fund trustees in January 2006. On the surface the plan was all about injecting new cash into the health service, but its ulterior motive was to open up the supply side of NHS provision to the market. Or, to put it another way, to ensure that Dash and Steven's health insurers, drug cartels and venture capital boys not only gained a substantial slice of the current NHS pie, but that health provision was increasingly refashioned to serve their interests.

The King's Fund's links with private healthcare companies go even further. There are another 14 favoured conglomerates who stand to gain contracts from the PCTs to undertake all or part of their commissioning work under the so-called "Framework for procuring External Support for Commissioners" (FESC). One of these is another US healthcare giant, Humana. Last year it gave £30,000 to the fund towards seminars and conferences for movers 'n' shakers in the "new" NHS. Dr Rebecca Rosen, Humana's medical director, is a King's Fund senior associate – as are two of Humana's advisory board: Dr Michael Dixon and former Tory health minister Baroness Cumberledge.

When the King's Fund made its recommendations to the review of health provision by Lord Darzi, it said that while "primary care services should be opened up through greater use of competition and contracting mechanisms", the NHS should now concentrate on its role as a commissioning body. With commissioning itself rapidly being outsourced it's increasingly hard to see what role the fund sees for the public sector. And indeed whether the fund itself is still right to assert: "In an ever changing world, our independence and integrity remain at the heart of all we do."

MEDICINE BALLS

A galling error

THE revelation that a gynaecology patient had her gall bladder mistakenly removed at health minister Lord Darzi's hospital (St Mary's, London) by a member of his team is particularly embarrassing. His NHS review promotes the highest-quality care for all and an end to mistakes that should "never" happen – eg surgery on the wrong side, wrong organ or wrong patient.

It's also puzzling given Darzi's personal interest in patient safety. Darzi was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Excellence in Higher and Further Education in 2001, for pioneering new technologies in surgical training and safety. When M.D. interviewed him at St Mary's for the Radio 4 programme *To Err Is Human*, he explained how the surgical teams under his leadership have been piloting a safety checklist for the World Health Organization[1] that should make such an error impossible. The first check is: "Before induction of anaesthesia, patient has confirmed identity, site, procedure and consent." The St Mary's team appears to have failed on all four counts.

Of course, a checklist is only as good as the people using it, but Darzi has also pioneered (and patented) the use of a surgical simulator, where his teams learn to manage scenarios such as constant interruption in theatre, catastrophic blood loss and the wrong patient wheeled in. He has also introduced surgical pre-briefing and de-briefing to ensure everyone in the team knows each other's name and role, and that any likely problem is anticipated. The ethos here is to ensure that anyone, no matter how junior, can voice any concerns and be heard. This was introduced following the famous "wrong kidney" incident in Wales when both a junior nurse and medical student suggested the consultant was operating on the wrong side but were overruled.

Darzi also plays videos on the wards to encourage patients to "speak up" if they have any concerns, such as a nurse not washing her hands or a surgeon wanting to remove a perfectly healthy part of your body. And he has appointed an academic psychologist to work alongside him to understand the behavioural and communication aspects of medical error. Darzi himself has clearly learned from this – one of his trainee surgeons described how Darzi reduced a nurse to tears with his assertive manner and colourful language some years ago. But when I asked him how he would react today if a junior nurse questioned his management, he said: "That would be the most refreshing thing ever."

Hospital care is complex and stressful, and mistakes will inevitably happen. This week, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges reminded doctors how to diagnose death in order to cut down on the number of snoring-in-the-mortuary incidents. Safer healthcare requires inspiration and leadership, and it's hard to provide it from Whitehall. But Darzi is so obsessed with safety that he has installed a black box (also patented) in some operating theatres at St Mary's to record not just the patient's vital signs but also to video the surgical team at work. So at least we should get a full understanding of why his training, teamwork, speak-up culture and safety checklist all failed. In the meantime, download the checklist below and mark up the organ you want out.

M.D.

[1]www.who.int/patientsafety/safesurgery/tools_resources/SSSL_Checklist_finalJun08.pdf

Problems with their privates

A FINE example of how the new NHS "world-class commissioning" works comes from Suffolk, where the primary care trust put its sexual health services out to tender.

They are currently provided by Ipswich Hospital, West Suffolk Hospital and Suffolk Hospital, and the three NHS trusts duly submitted a combined bid. Although it met all the criteria, especially the clinical provision, the hospitals' bid failed because it was not "transformational" and the marketing plan was not "robust".

Instead the contract was awarded to private contractor Take Care Now (TCN), which has not run sexual health services before and, it seems, simply wants to contract the work to er… the existing three hospital providers!

The three trusts have now written to the PCT warning that sexual health services in Suffolk are at risk because, although they had initial talks with TCN in July, "no further contractual meetings" have taken place since then. In the meantime staff, uncertain about their jobs and worried about their futures, are leaving and putting a strain on the service.

One of the driving forces behind change in sexual health provision in Suffolk is Dr Amanda Jones, deputy director of public health, whose GP husband just happens to sit on the board of TCN. But no conflict there. The PCT told the *Eye* that she had declared the relationship and "did not take part in the decision-making part of the tender award process. As the public health expert in sexual health it is necessary that she work on the clinical elements of the specification."

TCN, which already has two other contracts with the PCT – for out-of-hours cover and minor injuries – is due to start running all sexual health services from 1 April.

An open and shut case

***EYE* readers tell us that one of the casualties of the financial mismanagement that left Bromley Hospitals Trust £100m in the red (see last *Eye*) is its centre of excellence for elective surgery, the highly popular and successful Orpington Treatment Centre.**

Despite opening only five years ago at a cost of £9m, it is to be mothballed. According to the trust, closure is to help balance books and save £2m a year, but that figure is being challenged by clinicians and campaigners who claim that the centre generated a £3.5m surplus over expenditure last year.

Along with the local health watchdogs they have appealed to health secretary Alan Johnson to intervene, claiming the proposals to shut the centre down never went out to consultation.

However, while the trust was so busy winding down operating theatres, it appears that, thanks to its creaking computer system, it didn't notice a backlog of 700 patients. In order to meet government targets, these patients must have their surgery by the end of December. Hence they are speedily being diverted to two private hospitals in Beckenham and Orpington, or to two NHS hospitals much further away in Ilford and Hillingdon! The man who has taken the decision to shut the unit, Michael Marchment, is the latest in a line of temporary chief executives who have been running the trust on lucrative six-month contracts. As he is due to complete his session in January, he will be long gone by the time yet more unhappy Bromley Hospitals Trust chickens come home to roost.

In the City

MOST Russian oligarchs believe money buys anything and everything – officials, journalists, judges, politicians, entire governments.

They are not great believers in nuance or discretion, more in the naked power of their money. That faith was clearly repaid by the attraction of aluminium tsar Oleg Deripaska's yacht and associated largesse to Lord Mandelson and George Osborne. But why did such high-profile political operators find the controversial Deripaska an appropriate host on so many occasions?

Anybody who has studied Deripaska's rise and rise to become Russia's richest man – a title that may now be history as western banks demand repayment and assets are sold or handed over to creditors – would have had plenty of reasons to pause before accepting an invitation.

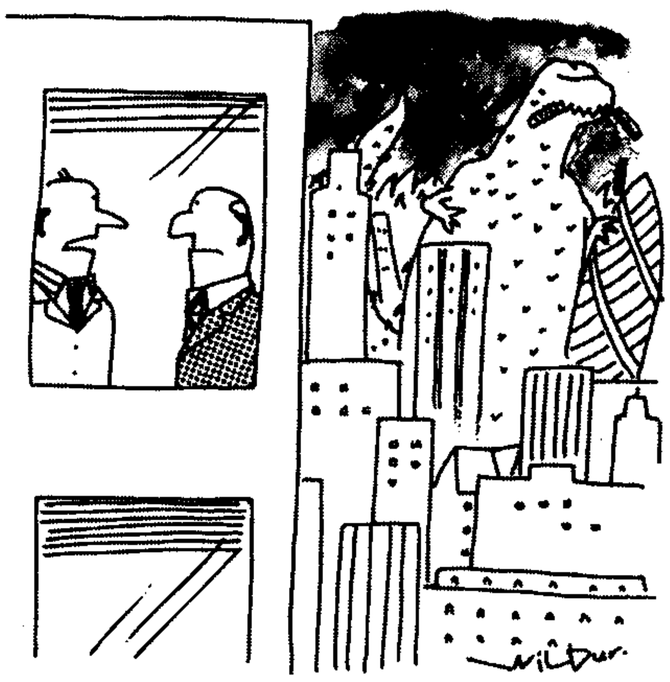
To begin with, there is the little matter of the rather dim view taken of the Rusal boss by the American authorities, who are not known for their pickiness when it comes to the rich. Until late 2005 Deripaska had been refused a visa to enter the US, despite his prominence since 2001 as the face of one of the world's largest aluminium groups. After much lobbying he was finally granted a visa, for the first time since 1998, only for it to be revoked in July 2006 because of what were described as "concerns". The *Wall Street Journal* reported last year that FBI officials believed Deripaska had not been "candid with them about his past business dealings". Britain had continued to allow Deripaska to visit during the US ban.

The reason for those concerns was the industry in which Deripaska made his money. During the 90s the Siberian aluminium industry was heavily infiltrated by the Russian mafia. Contract killings and extortion were regular business tactics used by the gangsters – obviously without the knowledge or involvement of the businessmen involved.

One of the mafia figures who featured in the bloody conflict was Anton Malevsky, head of the Izmailovo crime group in Moscow. Malevsky was associated with Deripaska and the now Israel-based Russian businessman Michael Cherney as what eventually emerged as a significant part of Rusal was created. Malevsky was never convicted of any crime and Cherney disputes that he was a mobster. However, Malevsky was deported from Israel back to Russia in the late 90s on suspicion of being a mafia boss.

Deripaska "denies that he was ever a partner, in any normally accepted commercial meaning of the word" with Cherney, according to Mr Justice Christopher Clarke in his recent high court ruling on an ongoing dispute between the two men. Deripaska claims Cherney and Malevsky were providing "protection" that he was forced to accept.

According to Mr Justice Clarke, "Mr Deripaska appears to have sought to hide any connection with Mr Malevsky from a Swiss investigating magistrate" to whom he gave evidence in 2005. "I know this person only by name," Deripaska had said.



"The City's taken a pounding... but I think we're through the worst"

However, Deripaska's attempts to distance himself from Malevsky and Cherney were contradicted by both Cherney and Malevsky's widow – he died in a 2001 parachuting accident – during the recent high court case brought against Deripaska by Cherney, who claims he is still owed for a 13 percent stake in Rusal under a 2001 disputed agreement.

Cherney was at one time banned from entering Britain. This ban was lifted in 2006. Cherney, however, remained banned from the US. He has always denied any links to organised crime or any wrongdoing, saying that he has been the victim of a campaign of smears by his enemies.

But what went on in Siberia during the 90s did not only emerge with the Clarke judgment in July. The role of Malevsky and organised crime in the "aluminium wars" was no secret. The research available to European commissioners or British political parties would have easily discovered it, as it is well known to law enforcement experts and has been much publicised here, in the US and in Russia.

Osborne could have consulted brothers Simon and David Reuben, who have given the Tories approaching £200,000 since last year. The Reubens were originally in partnership with Michael Cherney and his brother, Lev Chernoy, as well as Deripaska. The Reubens later split with Cherney before themselves becoming victims of the "aluminium wars" and losing control of their business and having to sell out.

They subsequently sued Deripaska and settled in 2005. They also sued *Fortune* magazine in London over a 2000 article, "Capitalism in a cold climate", which detailed their involvement with Cherney and mentioned Malevsky. This, too, was settled before trial in 2004. The Reubens denied any involvement with organised crime or wrongdoing but said that Cherney had links to "dubious individuals" in Russia.

Deripaska has form for settlements with former aluminium business partners. In addition to the Reubens, he and/or Rusal have settled with the Zhivilo brothers and Anatoly "The Bull" Bykov. Both had previously controlled valuable Siberian smelters. Another Russian businessman made a series of unproved allegations against Deripaska, some involving Malevsky, all of which he denounced as untrue. Several cases have been brought against Deripaska and Rusal in US courts using some of these allegations but were thrown out for lack of evidence or jurisdiction.

Rusal was also no stranger to criticism in the British courts before Mr Justice Clarke decided in July that Cherney could bring his case against Deripaska in London because he would not get a fair trial in Russia. Deripaska is appealing that decision.

In November 2003 Mr Justice Jack found for Tekron Resources against the Rusal-controlled Guinea Investment Company in a dispute over a bauxite mine and refinery in the West African state. Tekron claimed it was owed $3.5m in commission payments; after acquiring GIC, Rusal had not honoured an agreement to make the payments. The judge described some of the Rusal/GIC evidence as "nonsense". Finding for Tekron, he declared: "It is apparent from these matters that under the threat of litigation in London Rusal have done what they can to blacken the names of Tekron and its principals in Guinea. On the evidence before me they have not only failed but have secured indirect evidence that the government considers that Tekron have behaved properly."

In October 2005, Mr Justice Blackburne was even more critical of Rusal's role in a dispute involving an aluminium smelter in Tajikistan. The state-owned Tajik company Tadaz sued its former partner Ansol, alleging corruption and fraud. Ansol in turn countersued its partner Rusal for squeezing it out of the smelter contract.

"The strong overall impression which I have gained is that, notwithstanding the joint venture, Rusal has decided to further its own interests through the exploitation of Tadaz's aluminium production capacity," the judge declared, adding: "In short, from once being Ansol's partner… Rusal has now become Ansol's rival and, as part of the pursuit of its commercial interest, is promoting this litigation."

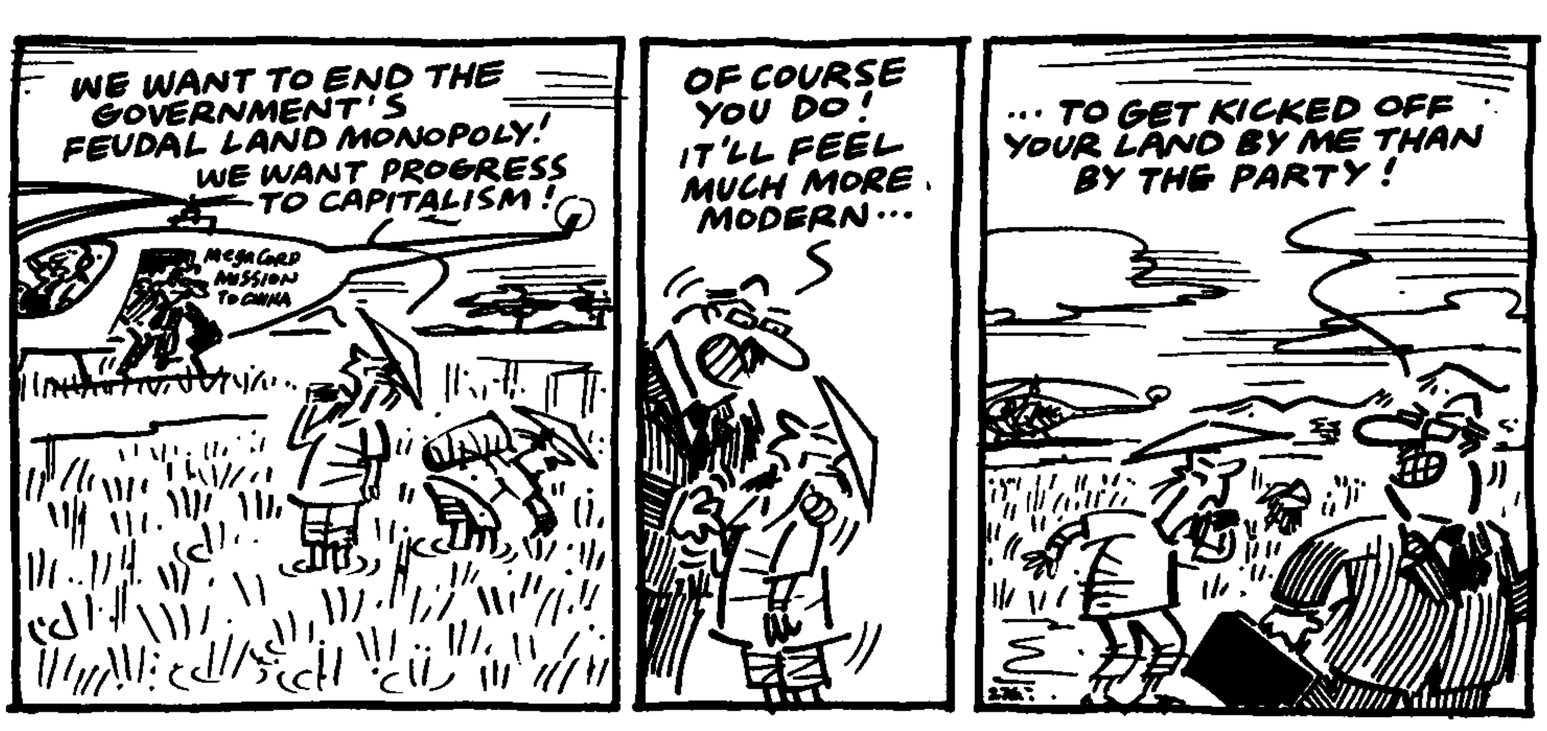
Another aspect of Rusal's behaviour also concerned the judge. "A further matter which strikes me as odd and unsatisfactory is that although Rusal is happy to assist Tadaz in the prosecution of Tadaz's claims in this jurisdiction against Ansol and others, it has indicated… that it intends to contest the jurisdiction of this court to try that claim. That is not at all an attractive posture."

In October 2006, permission was given for a civil action to go ahead in which Rusal was accused of hacking into the computers at the London office for Ashton International, a company that provided consultancy services to the Guernsey-registered Ansol. Rusal strongly denied any involvement. But Jonathan Hirst QC, sitting as a deputy high court judge, said: "I am satisfied that the claimants have shown there is a serious issue to be tried… In my view, significant damage occurred in England where the server was improperly accessed and the confidential and privileged information was viewed and downloaded."

The Rusal/Ansol litigation was settled in April last year. But three months later the Tajik company brought a new action in the British Virgin Islands against Rusal, alleging that the company was aware of bribes paid by Ansol. Rusal and Ansol deny these claims.

Against this welter of legal skirmishing, however, Mandelson and Osborne could put the Rothschild imprimatur. Nat Rothschild has long been close to Deripaska; his father, Lord Rothschild, was another fan, as he had been of jailed Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The Russian oligarchs quickly realised – like the American robber barons of old – that philanthropy

☛ *See over...*


THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
WE WANT TO END THE GOVERNMENT'S FEUDAL LAND MONOPOLY! WE WANT PROGRESS TO CAPITALISM!
MESSAGE MISSION TO CHINA
OF COURSE YOU DO! IT'LL FEEL MUCH MORE MODERN...
... TO GET KICKED OFF YOUR LAND BY ME THAN BY THE PARTY!

covered a multitude of sins and opened many doors. Large donations for London exhibitions attract the great and the good and the glow extends to those who introduce those with bottomless wallets.

In 2003, Deripaska and Lord R sponsored an exhibition of historic chess sets at Somerset House. Rusal became a sponsor of the Bolshoi Theatre and financed its London season in 2006 at Covent Garden – an event attended by Mandelson.

Nat Rothschild has been a business partner as well as an adviser to Deripaska. He was a director of Eagle Capital Group, a BVI company that was renamed En+ Group and relocated to Jersey in 2005, becoming a key company through which Deripaska controlled his empire. En+ was the parent of another key Deripaska company registered in Jersey, Rusal Limited, which had formerly existed in the BVI as Rusal Holdings. In 2006, Rusal declared that the Jersey company controlled its aluminium interests and that Deripaska was the 100 percent owner. His other interests, such as cars and trucks, were said to be controlled through En+ in Jersey.

It may well be said that Deripaska is merely a tough businessman and as such attracts lawsuits and unfair allegations. It is also correct that he – like his partner turned enemy Cherney – has never been convicted of any crime.

But politics is all about judgement and public perception – a test both Mandelson and Osborne appear to have failed. Which is why Mandelson says he will be more careful, though he is still prepared to meet Deripaska – in the public interest, of course – and Osborne has apologised for passing the Tory cap round on the oligarch's yacht.

A SNAPSHOT of how sub-prime lending has gone bad in Britain is provided by the latest results from GMAC-RFC, probably the largest player in that market and a major supplier of toxic loans to Bradford & Bingley. The former building society's insatiable demand for these loans led to its collapse into nationalisation.

The GMAC accounts, which are only to December 2007, reveal that repossessions on the largely self-certified "liar loans" it was still holding had rocketed six-fold from 0.3 percent to 1.8 percent. The value of these repossessed mortgage loans leapt from £20m to £73m.

More than £900m in loans was in arrears or behind with payments – 23 percent of the total. This was down from 32 percent, or £1.86bn, a year before. But this was as much due to GMAC selling off loans as better arrears management. The total mortgage loan book was down from £5.8bn to £3.9bn.

GMAC wrote off £169m from its mortgage loans, as a result of which it recorded a £140m loss for 2007 compared with a £110m profit for 2006. GMAC indicates that it managed to unload a further £375m in mortgages earlier this year, probably reflecting its since renegotiated agreement with B&B.

The accounts were signed off in March but only filed this month. But why hurry with bad news? Especially when GMAC's US parent's own future is in question.

GOOD to see the Sage of Omaha and probably still the world's richest man, Warren Buffett, doing his bit to boost confidence amid collapsing stock markets. "Today my money and my mouth say equities," the great investor wrote in the *New York Times* some two weeks ago.

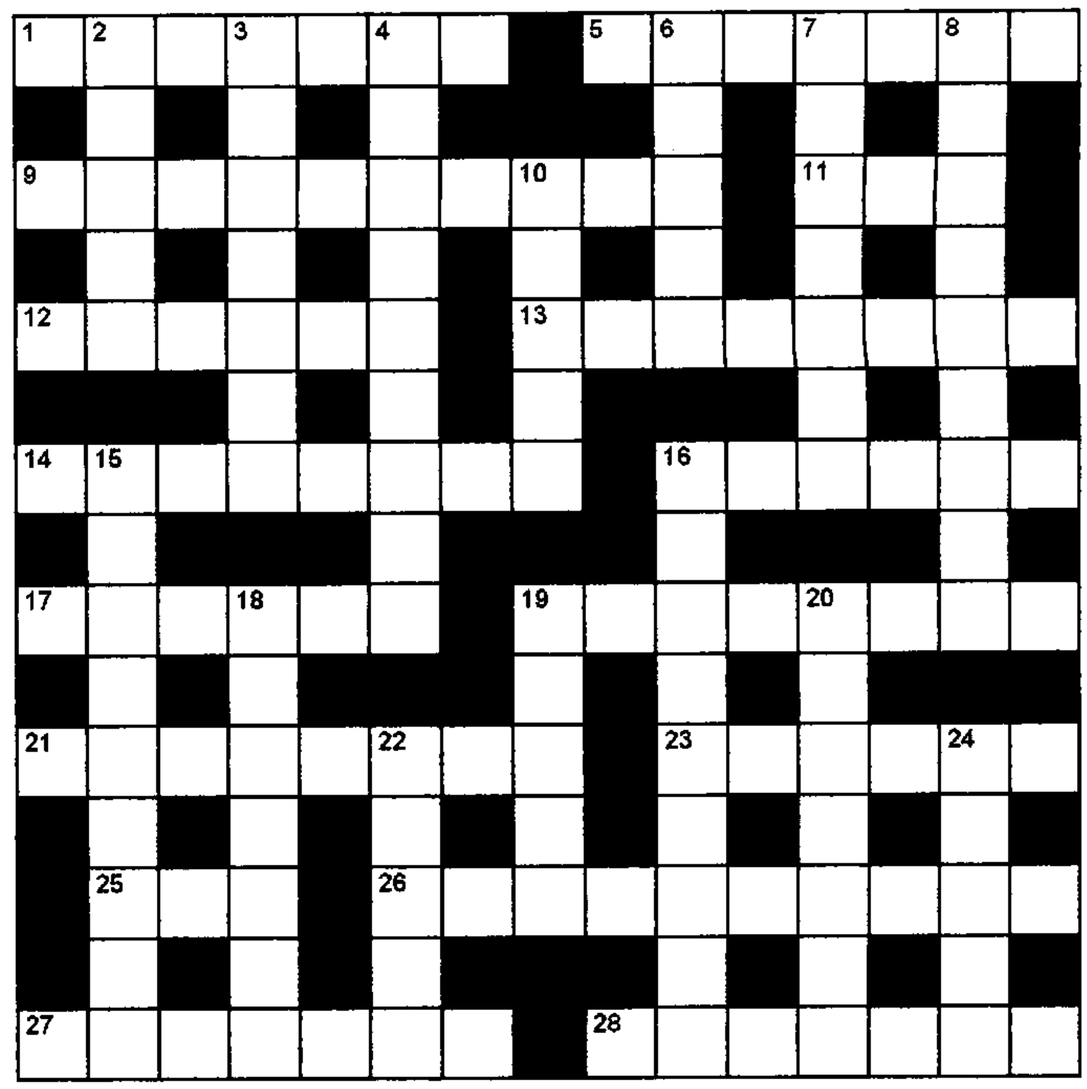
Cynics might be reminded of a similar statement made by oil mogul John D Rockefeller, the Buffett of his time, in October 1929 after the first three days of the Great Crash: "Believing that fundamental conditions of the country are sound, my son and I have for some time been purchasing sound common stocks."

The response of comedian Eddie Cantor was: "Sure – who else had any money left?" Shares continued to fall despite the Rockefeller vote of confidence – as they have done since the Sage spoke.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 377

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 7 November 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Organ friction? Possibly something for you to put on here in the mag. (3,4)

5 One who's lost faith in Brown? ("Character making U-turn without developing. etc.") (7)

9 Brown, once seeing risk – "turn back!" (10)

11 See 25ac.

12 Traditionally macho type but maybe not one whose erection you could depend on? (6)

13 Balls possibly appended to special guests, as underpants usually are (8)

14/19 Common people's sweetheart had gun customised (3,5,8)

16 Could be Harriet's task to protect leaders of exhausted party (6)

17 Place former party leader, not Hard Harry (6)

19 See 14ac.

21 Transport bill backed by Herb and Bill (8)

23 Engineer gets to toss king off with broken leg (6)

25/11 Accordingly, remove clothing and beat it (3,3)

26 Talk like politician Balls? (5,5)

27 Balls' second day shift talk? (7)

28 Defector's case dismissed, being on the piss (7)

DOWN

2 It's rough backing Straw and Balls (5)

3 Rambler taking turn with slut (7)

4 *Lancet* to merge with *Eye*; changes to be made – it could get hot! (9)

6 Legislative body that's no stranger to spin (5)

7 Mug shot? Leave behind in jug's receptacle (5-2)

8 Unusual effort needed to comprehend Conservative measure (a bit leftish?) (3-6)

10 Fair escape? Eff-off! (5)

15 A singularly cheeky person would be inadequate (4-5)

16 Miliband's last to admit hospital places on the decline (9)

18 One putting a gloss on broadcast: "Money no longer available" (7)

19 Not pissed so kept in the film? (5)

20 Was a confessor given fresh air and drink? (7)

22 Whacks off with Conservative oafs (5)

24 Mistake genital areas for an auditor (5)

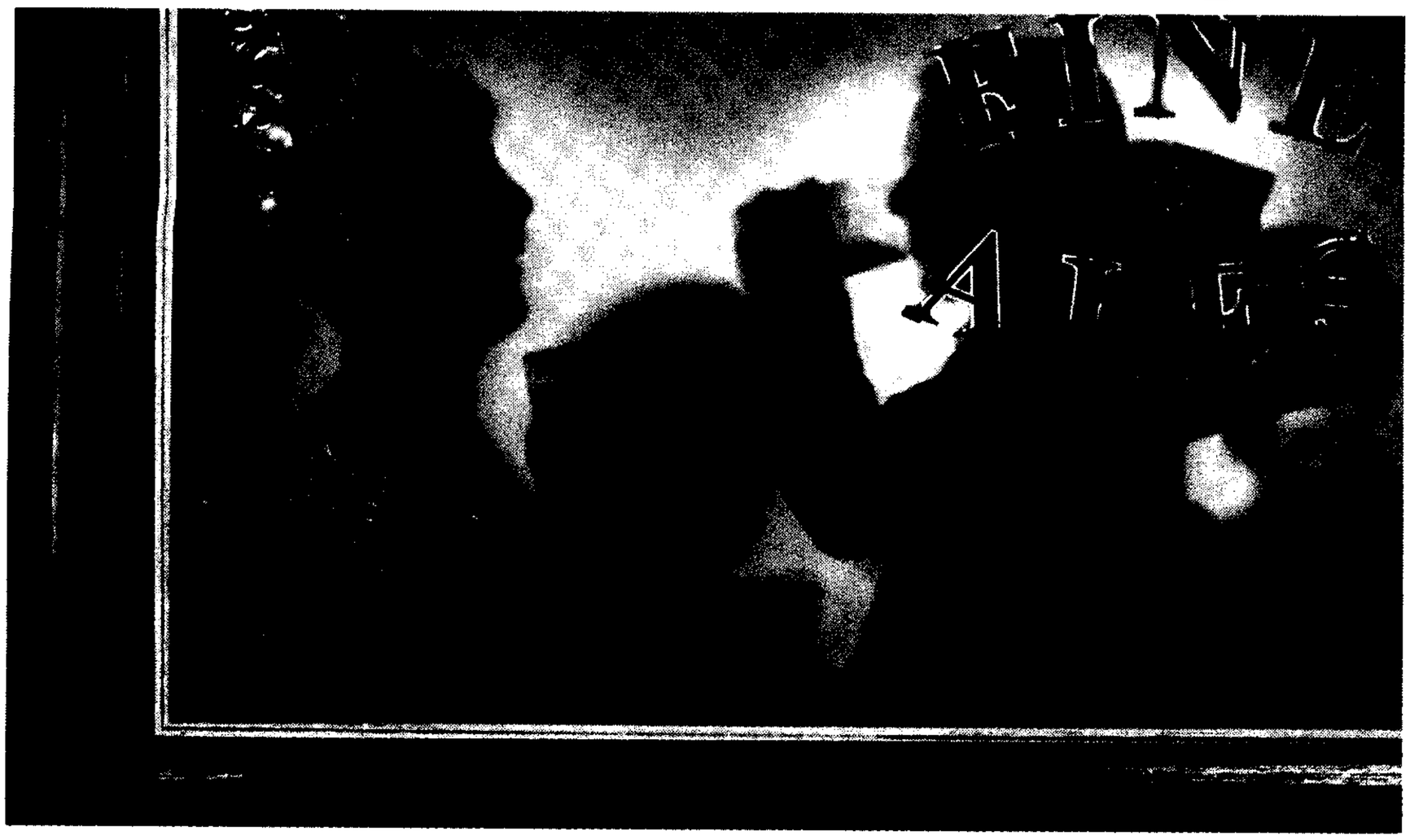
Crossword 376 winner: DAVID BEARDSWORTH

ACROSS: 7 Roost 9 Scapegoat 10 Master-key 11 Raked 12/13 Dmitry Medvedev 16 Nemesis 18 Slapper 20 Annotate 22 Alumni 26 Elbow room 27 Tent-poles 28 Donor.

DOWN: 1 Prima donna 2 Bonsai 3 Easy-peasy 4 Henry V 5 Cocked up 6/25A Stud poker 8 The Arts 9 Sake 14 Virgin Mary 15 Tsetse fly 17 Monokini 19 Allowed 21 Thrips 23 Mooing 24 Ibis 25 Pitt.

Yobs
HUSBAND
The banks have been totally incompetent...
...The way they've handled this crisis...
...'Cause if we lend money we bleedin' make sure we get it back

"The beer was so good the *pub crawl* never got out of the first pub."



It was the annual St. Arnold's Rugby Club Reunion. As always, I'd chosen the first pub for its exceptional Theakstons Best Bitter.

"Just the two here... then on to the next." I declared, officiously.

As the beer went down, the volume went up.

Then a voice interrupted itself through the din. *"By, this Theakstons Best Bitter is absolutely* COCK ON!"

That's when Harry the 'happy' hooker sidled up to me. *"The old knee injury's playing up again, skipper."* he confessed. *"Don't think I'll make it to the next pub."*

One by one the others followed. Within minutes a combination of muscle strains, pulled hamstrings, twisted ligaments and a suspected case of Blackwater fever had rendered the entire squad incapable of moving on.

There was only one thing for it. *"OK lads,"* I announced, *"We'll stop here and get some more Theakstons Best Bitter in."*

As the pints arrived Harry asked. *"So, skip, what's your ailment?"*

"It's extreme dehydration," I said, reaching for my glass. *"Strange,"* Harry mused, *"That's exactly what you had last year."*

"And the year before that." I replied.

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View of Tripoli (adapted), lithograph c. 1850

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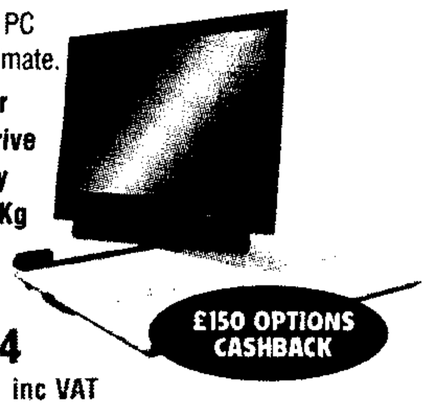

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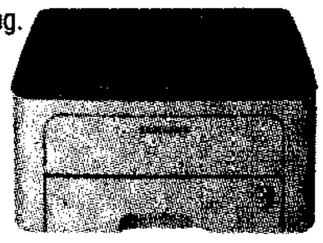

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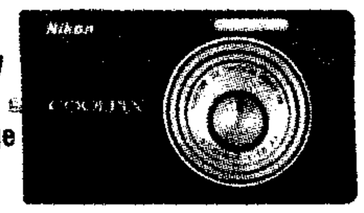

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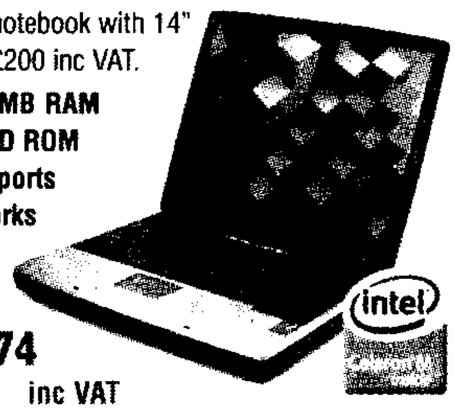

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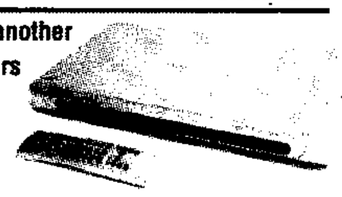

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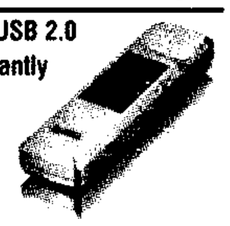

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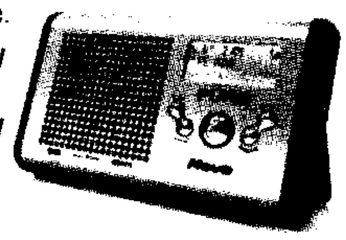

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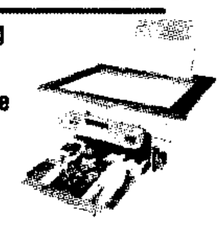

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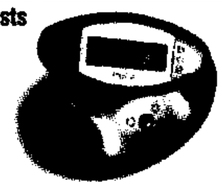

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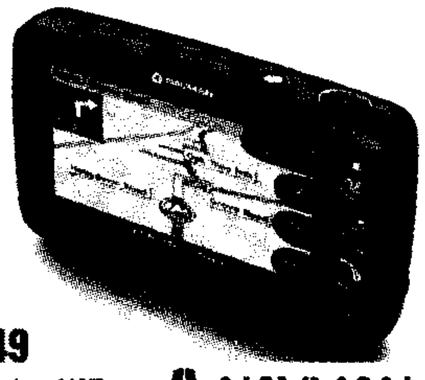

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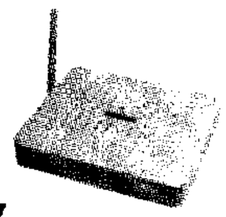

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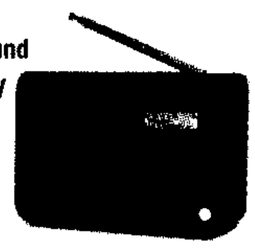

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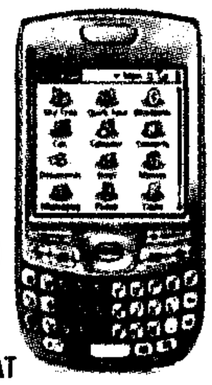

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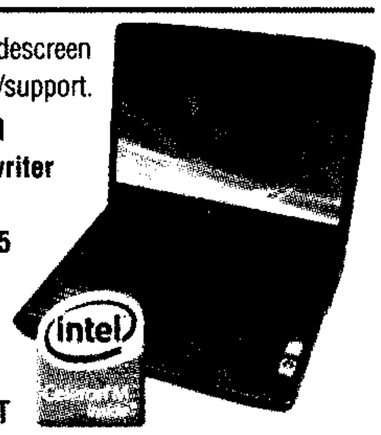

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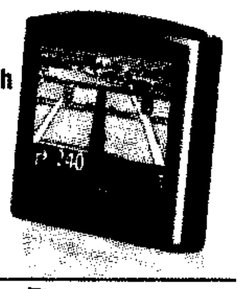

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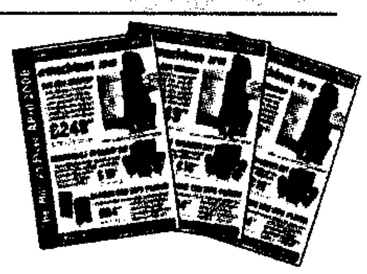

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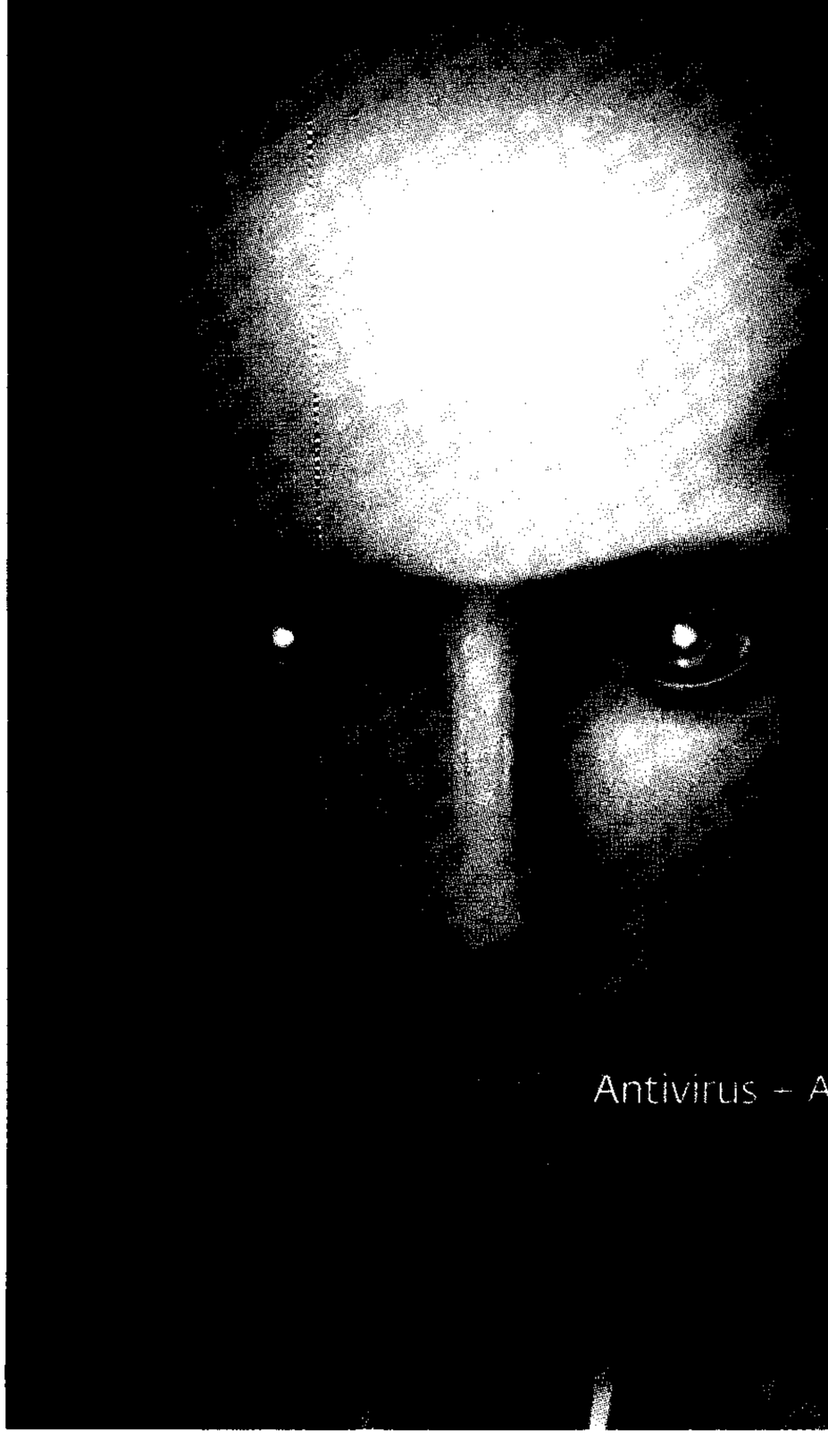

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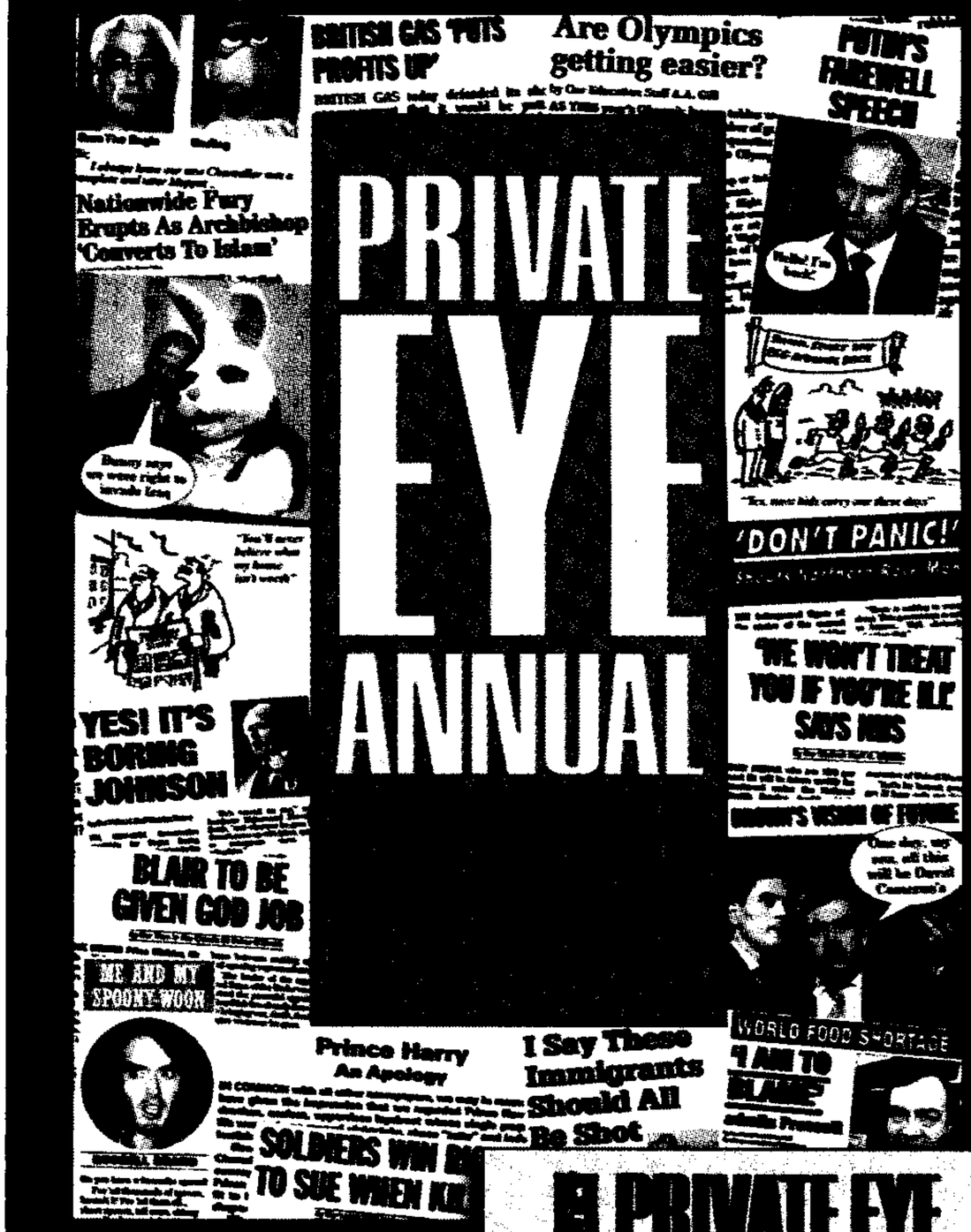
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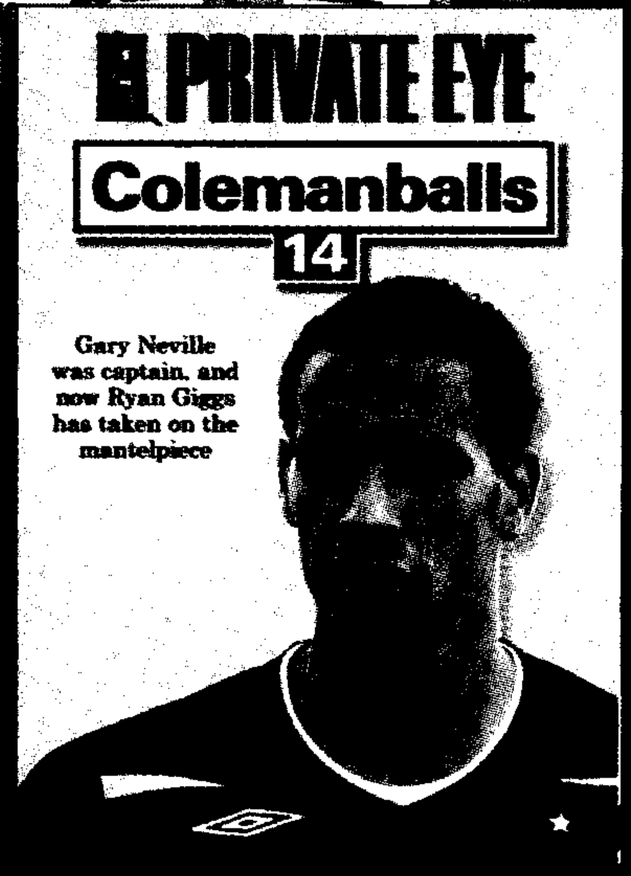

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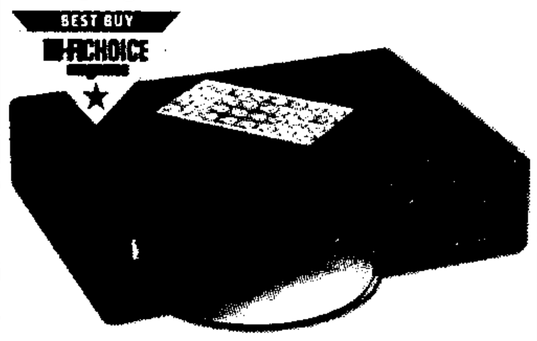

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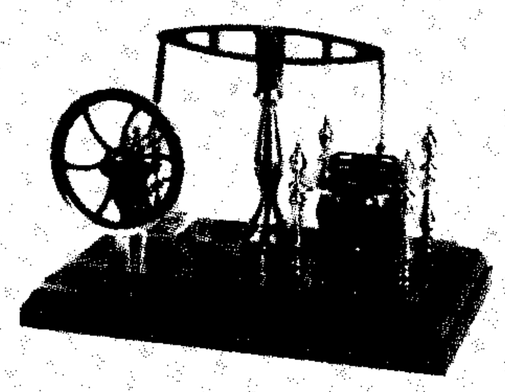
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☐ £240 helps support a welfare pensioner for an entire year
☐ My preferred amount £_____

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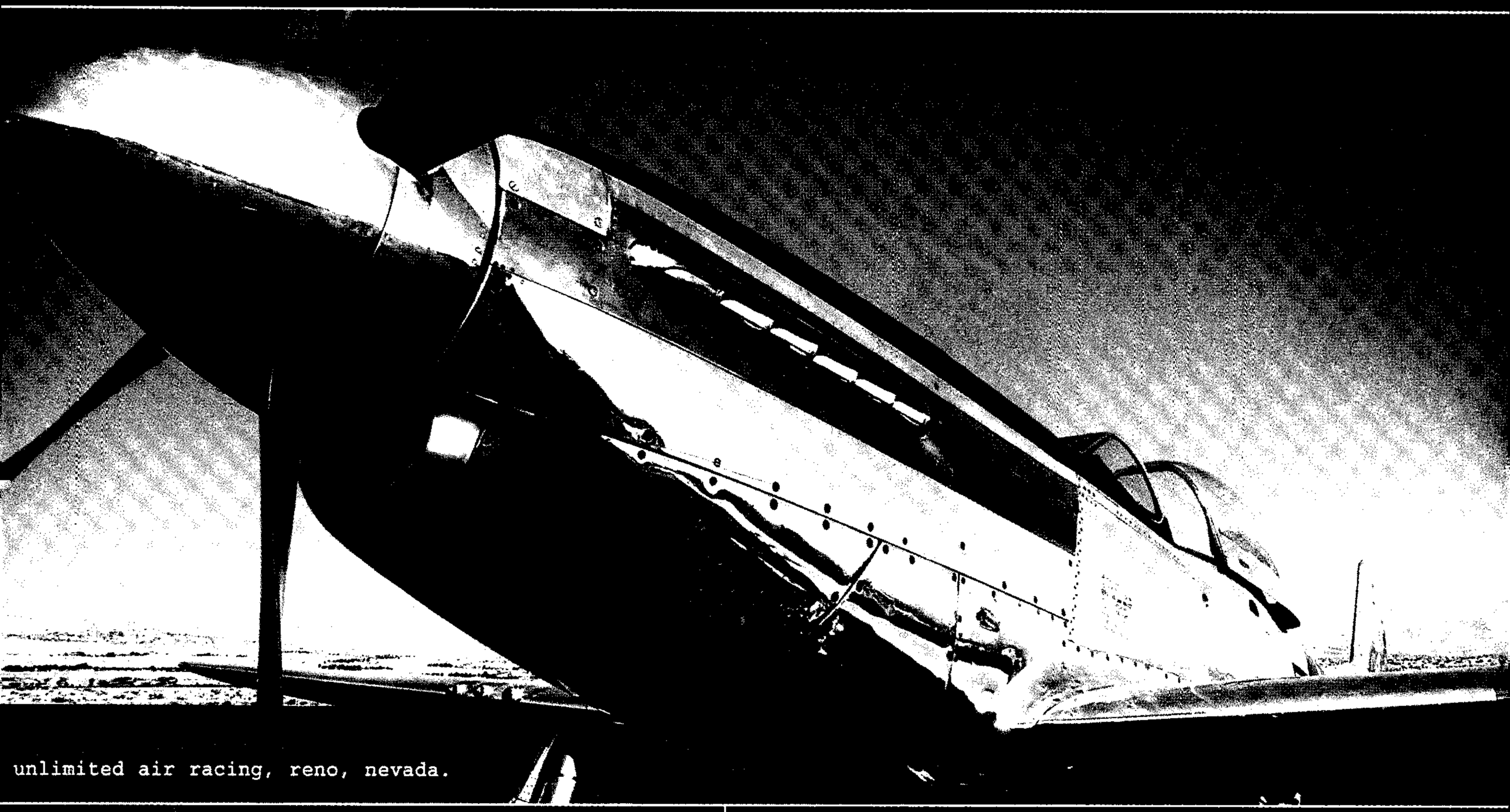

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